

Prevalence of self-reported food allergy in U.S. adults: 2001, 2006, and 2010

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Key Findings

FDA researchers found an increase in the prevalence of self-reported food allergy among U.S. adults, after analyzing questions on food allergy prevalence from the 2001, 2006, and 2010 FDA Food Safety Surveys.¹

- Self-reports of food allergy increased significantly from 9.1% in 2001 to 13% in 2010 ($p < 0.001$).
The increase was not accompanied by a similar rise in self-reported doctor diagnosis (5.3% in 2001 and 6.5% in 2010).
- About 80% of respondents reported an allergy to one of the eight major food allergens.
In 2010, milk, shellfish, and fruits were the most commonly reported food allergens, similar to 2001.

The research findings suggest that U.S. adults are increasingly self-reporting they have a food allergy without obtaining a medical diagnosis. Reasons for this remain unclear. However, since restricting foods and food choices can be detrimental to quality of life and overall health, more focused educational efforts are needed to encourage proper food allergy diagnosis in adults and reverse a potentially adverse health trend.

Self-reported and Self-reported Doctor-diagnosed Food Allergy; FDA Food Safety Surveys

Survey Year	Survey Sample Size	No. Self-Reporting Food Allergy (%)	No. Self-Reporting Doctor Diagnosed Food Allergy (%)
2001	4482	471 (9.0)	279 (5.3)
2006	4539	737 (14.9)	385 (7.6)
2010	4568	574 (13.0)	323 (6.5)

Number and Percentage of Persons with Self-reported Doctor-diagnosed Food Allergy; 2010 FDA Food Safety Survey

Food allergy to:	No.	Percentage with allergic reaction (n=323)
Major allergens	255	76
Milk / Dairy	96	32
Eggs	36	9
Fish	41	13
Shellfish	109	26
Tree Nuts	33	12
Peanuts	28	10
Wheat / Gluten	60	14
Soy	8	2
Other foods		
Fruit / Vegetable	88	27

¹ The FDA Food Safety Survey is a cross-sectional, list-assisted, random-digit-dial landline telephone survey (cell phones were included in the survey starting in 2015) of American consumers conducted every 3–5 years since 1988. Respondents are 18 years of age or older. Since similar questions are asked to participants over subsequent surveys, researchers compared 2010 Food Safety Survey data on food allergy-related questions with 2006 and 2001 data, and highlighted relevant differences at these time periods. Results are weighted.