

MIND AND BODY · Published December 23, 2010 · Last Update November 20, 2014

Shea Nuts Appear Safe in Allergy Study

By | [Reuters](#)

NEW YORK – Shea butter is in everything from diaper cream to tissue paper, but the U.S. [Food and Drug Administration](#) considers shea nuts, from which the butter derives, to be tree nuts, and therefore potential allergens. A new study suggests, however, that shea butter poses little, if any, allergy risk to people who use products containing the substance.

The allergy triggers in other tree nuts and in peanuts are proteins. For nearly two million Americans, the immune system recognizes those proteins as harmful and launches an attack to rid the body of the molecules. If the assault is severe enough, the result can be an anaphylactic reaction marked by potentially deadly failure of the airways, although the number of deaths in the U.S. linked to nut allergies is small, about a dozen annually.

Dr. Kanwaljit K. Chawla, a pediatrician in training at Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York City, said she became curious about the potential for shea butter to trigger nut allergies while researching the safety of baby products.

"I was looking up baby products and realized that many of the 'natural' or 'organic' products contained shea butter, including wipes, diaper creams, baby lotion and nipple cream for breastfeeding mothers. I saw that the FDA listed shea nut as something to avoid if you are allergic to tree nuts," Chawla said. "But shea nut is in everything. How is it possible to avoid it?"

Shea nuts are mostly fat, but Chawla and her colleagues decided to see if they could extract any proteins from the nuts and whether those shea proteins would provoke an immune response.

The researchers first separated out the fat from shea nuts and were left with a miniscule amount of protein, less than 1/30th the amount present in cashews and less still than that in peanuts.

Even trace amounts of nut proteins can still pose problems for people susceptible to the substances, so Chawla's group tested the ability of shea protein to trigger an immune reaction. Using blood taken from several volunteers with known allergies to nuts, the researchers found that the principle immune molecule that would usually invoke an allergic response, immunoglobulin E, barely bound to the shea protein.

In other words, Chawla said, although shea nut in theory could be an allergy trigger, the evidence from her study suggests it's not. At least the immune system does not appear to recognize it as a nut protein.

What's more, since Americans typically don't eat shea butter, it can be an ingredient in European chocolates, the risk is likely even smaller, Chawla added.

The researchers reported their findings as a letter to the editor in the latest issue of the Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology.

Dr. Robert Wood, director of pediatric allergy at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, said the study provided "very useful information" for both doctors and patients. "While we would never say no one's going to be allergic to shea nut butter, it appears that people with other nut allergies should not be at higher risk from shea nuts," Dr. Wood said.

Conversation

Be the first to comment...

Coronavirus

U.S.

- Crime
- Military
- Education
- Terror
- Immigration
- Economy
- Personal Freedoms
- Fox News Investigates

World

Opinion

- U.N.
- Conflicts
- Terrorism
- Disasters
- Global Economy
- Environment
- Religion
- Scandals

Politics

Entertainment

- Executive
- Senate
- House
- Judiciary
- Foreign Policy
- Polls
- Elections

- Celebrity News
- Movies
- TV News
- Music News
- Style News
- Entertainment Video

Business

Lifestyle

- Personal Finance
- Economy
- Markets
- Watchlist
- Lifestyle
- Real Estate
- Tech

- Food + Drink
- Cars + Trucks
- Travel + Outdoors
- House + Home
- Fitness + Well-being
- Style + Beauty
- Family
- Faith

Science

Archaeology
Air & Space
Planet Earth
Wild Nature
Natural Science
Dinosaurs

Health

Coronavirus
Healthy Living
Medical Research
Mental Health
Cancer
Heart Health
Children's Health

About

Contact Us
Careers
Fox Around the World
Advertise With Us
Media Relations
Corporate Information
Compliance
Supplier Diversity

Tech

Security
Innovation
Drones
Computers
Video Games
Military Tech

TV

Shows
Personalities
Watch Live
Full Episodes
Show Clips
News Clips

Other

Fox Nation
Fox News Shop
Fox News Go
Fox News Radio
Newsletters
Alerts
Podcasts
Apps & Products

[New Terms of Use](#) [New Privacy Policy](#) [Do Not Sell my Personal Information](#) [Closed Captioning Policy](#) [Help](#) [Contact Us](#)
[Accessibility Statement](#)

This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten, or redistributed. ©2021 FOX News Network, LLC. All rights reserved. Quotes displayed in real-time or delayed by at least 15 minutes. Market data provided by Factset. Powered and implemented by FactSet Digital Solutions. Legal Statement. Mutual Fund and ETF data provided by Refinitiv Lipper.