

## What is Alpha-Gal syndrome?

Alpha-gal syndrome (AGS), also known as "red meat allergy" or "mammalian allergy," is an allergic reaction to a carbohydrate called galactose-alpha-1,3-galactose or alpha-gal for short. Alpha-gal is found in the meat, organs, and other parts of animals classified as mammals. All mammals contain the alpha-gal sugar molecule, with the exception of humans, Old World monkeys, and apes.

## Cause

In the United States, the lone star tick (*Amblyomma americanum*) (Figure 1) is the main tick linked to AGS. It is mostly found in the Midwest, Eastern, and Southeastern parts of the United States. AGS has also been found in other parts of the world including Japan, the Middle East, South America, Europe, Africa, East and South Asia, Australia, and New Zealand, where different kinds of ticks are responsible.

When the tick bites, it introduces alpha-gal into the body. This can trigger an immune response to produce IgE antibodies, which leads to an allergic reaction later when the person consumes mammalian products. Not every tick bite causes AGS, and not everyone who is



**Figure 1:** Lone Star Tick (*Amblyomma americanum*). Photo: Yoonseong Park, Kansas State University Entomologist

bitten will get the condition. The reasons why are still being studied.

## Manifestation/Symptoms

In a typical allergic reaction, to a bee sting or peanuts, for example, the symptoms appear within minutes of exposure to the allergen. With AGS, allergic reactions can happen 2 to 8 hours after consuming red meat or mammalian meat. This delay happens because the food must be digested and absorbed into the bloodstream before it can trigger an allergic response. This process can take several hours (Figure 2). Symptoms include:

- Hives
- Skin rashes
- Swelling of the lips, tongue, throat, and eyelids
- Wheezing
- Heartburn
- Dizziness or faintness
- Gastrointestinal discomfort (e.g. abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea)
- Anaphylaxis, characterized by symptoms like low blood pressure, swollen tongue or throat, trouble breathing, weak pulse, nausea, vomiting or diarrhea, dizziness or fainting (in severe cases this could be life-threatening).
- Atypical symptoms include arthritis, chronic urticaria, and swelling of the lips and tongue.

Not everyone has the same symptoms. If you experience very severe symptoms like difficulty breathing, dizziness, trouble swallowing, or full-body redness, don't delay and go to emergency services.

## Foods and products to avoid if you have AGS

- Mammalian meat such as pork, lamb, beef, and organ meats such as liver, kidney, etc.
- Meat broth, stock, gravy, bacon in salads, lard.

- Dairy products (milk, yogurt, cheese, butter, milk-based ice cream, milk-based kefir, whey protein).
- Gelatin-based foods such as candies, desserts, jellybeans, puddings, gummy bears, and marshmallows.
- Gelatin-based medications and vaccines. To check medications, see the resource list on page 3.
- Bovine extract (used to manufacture bioprosthetic valves)
- Carrageenan (food additive derived from seaweed but contains alpha-gal epitopes). Carrageenan is sometimes found in personal care products, such as toothpaste and shampoos, or used as a food additive to serve as a moisturizer, thickener, and emulsifier.
- Medications derived from mammalian-based ingredients
- Lanolin, a yellow fat from sheep, is used in topical products and vitamin D supplements.
- Glycerin, mammal-derived, can be used in topical products, medications, and foods to preserve moisture and texture.
- Magnesium stearate, used as a food emulsifier, binder, thickener, and lubricant.

## Diagnosis

AGS is often undiagnosed and misdiagnosed due to its relatively recent discovery and the atypical and often delayed onset of clinical symptoms. Diagnosis is based on clinical history and blood tests. Clinical history includes a detailed patient history that may include a delayed allergic reaction after consuming or being exposed to mammalian products and a history of tick bites. A blood test can help confirm AGS in people who have signs of the condition. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “The blood test looks for specific IgE

antibodies that the immune system produces in response to alpha-gal. However, a positive alpha-gal sIgE test does not mean a person has AGS. Providers should consider the tests along with symptoms, whether allergic reactions are delayed, and history of recent tick bites or outdoor exposure.”

## Risk Factors

People who live in the South, East, and Midwest parts of the United States are more likely to be around lone star ticks.

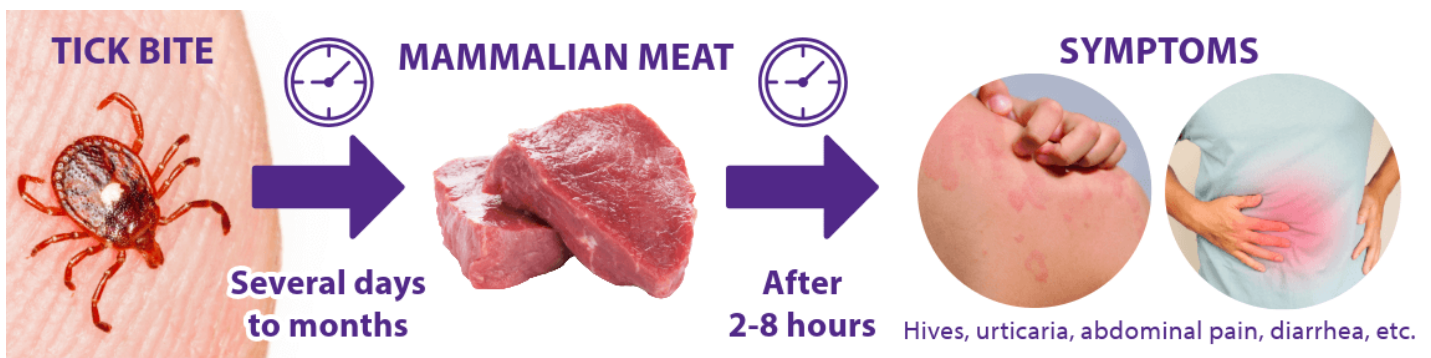
People who have pets, live in rural areas, or spend a lot of time outdoors — such as farmers, foresters, ranchers, hunters, hikers, and campers — have a higher chance of being bitten by ticks and may be more likely to get AGS.

## AGS Management

There is currently no cure for AGS. The primary recommendation for individuals with AGS is to avoid consuming mammalian products and their byproducts. Cooking does not reduce the amount of alpha-gal in foods. They should also be careful with personal care products that may contain ingredients derived from mammals.

Certain factors can increase the likelihood of AGS reactions. These include some medications (for example, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs, for pain relief), exercise, and alcohol. These factors may increase the likelihood of a reaction occurring, even with a small amount of alpha-gal.

Managing AGS can be difficult. Be cautious not to follow a diet that is too restrictive and be mindful of potential allergen exposure from cross-contamination. A very restrictive diet can increase the risk of nutrient deficiencies and lead to other health issues in the long run. Consulting a registered dietitian can help you understand your nutrient needs and determine which



**Figure 2:** A diagram showing the symptomatic process of Alpha-Gal syndrome from the initial tick bite to reaction.

foods to include to prevent deficiencies. A dietitian can also help check for iron and vitamin B12 blood levels and help you decide if you need supplements.

Pay close attention to which foods and products you need to avoid. Learn how to read food and personal care product labels. Also, keep track of which foods cause your symptoms.

## Prevention

- The best way to prevent AGS is to avoid tick bites. Ticks often live in bushy, grassy, and wooded areas.
- When outdoors, use insect repellants approved by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).
- Wear clothing that covers up exposed skin.
- Apply permethrin (insecticide) to your clothes and gear or buy pre-treated clothing.
- Check skin and clothing for ticks after spending time outdoors. Check your pets, too.
- Remove any ticks with tweezers.
- Shower immediately after outdoor exposure.

## Living with AGS

**Avoid tick bites:** Getting more tick bites can increase antibodies for alpha-gal and make symptoms worse.

**Avoid mammalian meats** and their byproducts.

**Read ingredient labels carefully:** Always read ingredient labels to make sure there are no hidden sources of alpha-gal in your food or non-food items.

**Talk with an allergist or dietitian:** They can support your management plan.

**Tell all healthcare providers:** Let all your healthcare providers know that you have AGS.

**Avoid certain medications:** Some medicines, vaccines and medical products can contain mammalian-derived components (e.g., gelatin, bovine-based ingredients). Ask your healthcare provider for alternatives.

**Carry an EpiPen:** If your healthcare provider has prescribed one, keep it with you in case of emergency.

**Wear a medical alert ID:** It is a good idea to have an ID that says you have AGS. This helps in emergency situations.

## Emotional and Social Support

**Join a support group:** There are local and online groups for people with AGS where you can connect and share experiences.

**Plan ahead when traveling:** If you're going out to eat or traveling, contact restaurants and airlines before you go to make sure they can accommodate your needs.

## AGS Resources for Alpha gal free products:

**Pillclarity:** List of alpha-gal free products, including medicinal items. <https://www.pillclarity.org/>

**SAGE alpha Gal:** Recipes for alpha-gal-free dishes. <https://sagealphagal.com/>

**FIG:** A comprehensive list of vegan products based on their ingredients. <https://foodisgood.com/>

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Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Director of Extension, Kansas State University, County Extension Councils, Extension Districts. Kansas State University is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

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**MF3724 December 2025**

# Alpha-Gal Syndrome Nutrients of Concern

Alpha-gal syndrome is a food allergy that some people get after being bitten by the lone star tick. After the bite, the person's body may react badly to eating red meat like beef, pork, or lamb, and sometimes dairy and byproducts like gelatin. Symptoms usually show up a few hours after eating. These can include stomach pain, hives, or more serious allergic reactions.



Because the reaction can be scary, some people become anxious and start avoiding more foods than they need to. This can make it harder to enjoy meals or eat out with friends. Doctors are still learning more about this condition, but avoiding red meat and other trigger foods is the best way to stay safe. AGS trigger foods can vary from person to person. Talk with your healthcare provider for individualized recommendations.

## What Happens When You Stop Eating Red Meat or Dairy?

When people stop eating certain foods, like beef, pork, milk, or cheese, they might not get enough important nutrients. Missing these foods can lead to low levels of iron, vitamin B12, calcium, and protein.

Foods	Key Nutrients
Red meat (beef, pork, lamb)	iron, zinc, B12, protein
Dairy (milk, cheese, yogurt)	calcium, vitamin D



## Why Are These Nutrients Important?

- **Iron** helps carry oxygen in your blood, gives you energy, and supports brain growth. It's especially important for pregnant women and kids. Low iron can cause tiredness and poor growth.
- **Zinc** helps your immune system and supports healthy growth and healing.
- **Vitamin B12** helps your body turn food into energy.
- **Protein** builds and repairs muscles and tissues in your body.
- **Calcium** builds strong bones and teeth.
- **Vitamin D** helps your bones stay strong and supports your muscles and immune system.

## What Can I Eat Instead?

If you can't eat red meat or dairy, there are other foods that can provide these nutrients. Here are some alpha-gal friendly foods:

Nutrient	Alternative Sources	Examples
Iron	Spinach, kale, lentils, chickpeas, seeds, white beans, kidney beans, fortified cereals, salmon, tuna, seafood	Add white beans and spinach to soups or try a tuna salad sandwich.
B12	Fortified cereals, nutritional yeast, salmon, tuna, eggs, turkey, chicken	Sprinkle nutritional yeast on popcorn or roasted vegetables for a cheesy flavor.
Zinc	Lentils, chickpeas, seeds (pumpkin, chia), cashews, oats, black beans, salmon, sardines, turkey, shrimp	Snack on a homemade trail mix with cashews and pumpkin seeds or top oatmeal with chia seeds.
Protein	Lentils, chickpeas, beans, tofu, nuts, nut butters, eggs, turkey, chicken, fish, seafood	Spread peanut butter on apple slices or bake trout fillets with garden vegetables.
Calcium	Fortified plant milks, fortified orange juice, collard greens, kale, white beans, broccoli	Blend kale into a fruit smoothie or make roasted broccoli as a side.
Vitamin D	Sunlight, fortified plant milks, rainbow trout, salmon, mushrooms, eggs	Scramble eggs with sauteed mushrooms and garden vegetables for breakfast.

## Should I Take Vitamins or Supplements?

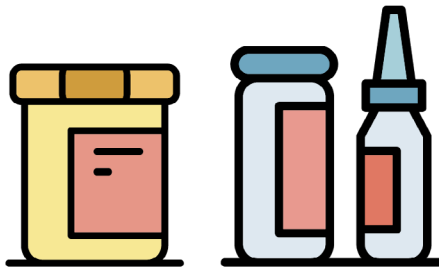
It's best to get your nutrients from food, but sometimes supplements can help.

## When Should I Consider Supplements?

- **Vitamin B12:** This vitamin is found in meat and dairy. If you don't eat those foods, you may need a supplement or eat foods like cereal or plant-based milk that have B12 added. Double check to make sure the vitamin B12 supplement is plant-based.
- **Iron:** If you don't eat meat or have low iron, you may need a supplement. Talk to a doctor first, because too much iron can be harmful.
- **Vitamin D:** If you don't get much sunlight, especially in the winter, a plant-based vitamin D supplement can help your bones and immune system stay strong.
- **Calcium:** If you don't drink milk or eat dairy, you may need calcium to help keep your bones healthy, especially as you get older.

## Thinking About Taking Supplements?

Before you start any supplements, talk to your healthcare provider or pharmacist. Some supplements, especially those made with gelatin or in gel-capsules may trigger an AGS reaction. Your pharmacist can help you select ones that are safe for you.



### References:

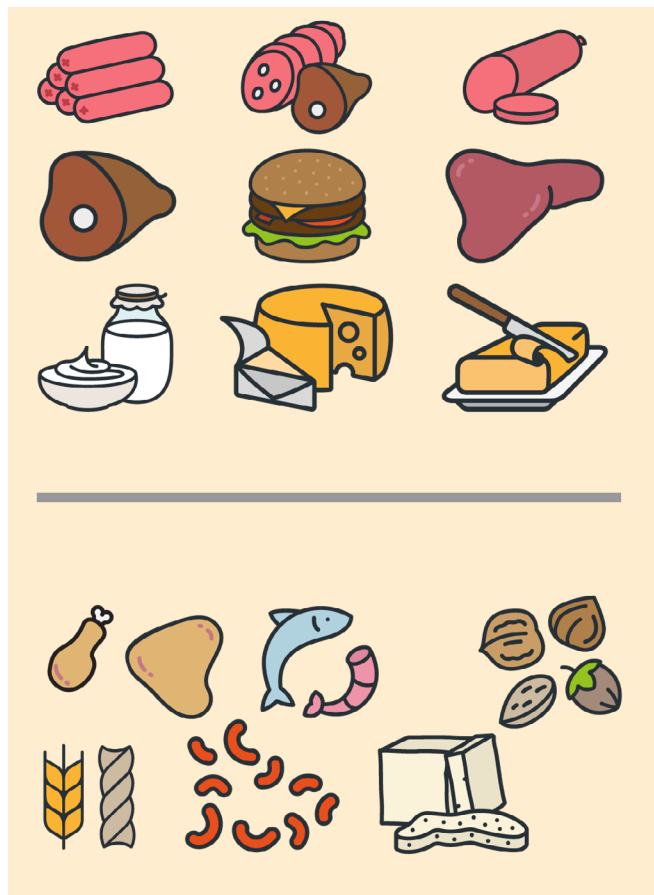
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# Alpha-Gal Syndrome Food Substitutions

Alpha-Gal Syndrome (AGS) is an allergy to the alpha-gal molecule found in meat and other products from mammals such as beef, pork, goat and sheep. It can develop after a person is bitten by the lone star tick.

Many of the foods recommended below are naturally free of mammal products, but some may have hidden ingredients or come into contact with mammal ingredients during processing. AGS trigger foods can vary from person to person. Talk with your healthcare provider to determine which foods need to be avoided. Check out the MU Extension publication *Shopping Tips for Alpha-Gal Syndrome* (N1352) for more information on hidden ingredients. It is important to carefully read food labels every time. Alpha-gal sensitivity varies from person to person. Consult with your healthcare provider or registered dietitian to determine which specific foods need to be avoided and to develop a safe eating plan tailored to your needs.

If you want to try a food substitute in your favorite recipe, start by buying a small package to test it out. You can also split the item with a friend to save money. Before using it, look up how much you should use in place of the original ingredient. To find food substitutes, try shopping at different places like local grocery stores, natural food stores, or ethnic markets. You can also order many foods online. If you don't see what you need, talk to the store manager or owner to ask if they can order allergy-friendly foods for you.



Original Item	Substitutions
Mammalian meat (Beef, pork, deer, rabbit, lamb/mutton, bison/buffalo/beefalo, etc.)	<p><b>Poultry:</b> Chicken, turkey, duck, quail, pigeon, goose, pheasant, dove, emu, ostrich, etc.</p> <p><b>Freshwater fish:</b> catfish, carp, walleye, trout, bass, crappie, etc.</p> <p><b>Saltwater fish:</b> salmon, tuna, cod, mahi mahi, snapper, flounder fillet, sardines, anchovies, etc.</p> <p><b>Shellfish:</b> shrimp/prawns, crab, lobster, clams, oysters, scallops, crayfish/crawfish/crawdads, etc.</p> <p><b>Plant-based proteins &amp; grains:</b> tofu, plant-based meat alternative, beans, quinoa, lentils, farro, barley, rice, oats, etc.</p>
Mammalian fats (Butter, lard, suet, tallow, etc.)	<p><b>For baking:</b> Shortening, coconut oil, apple sauce, margarine (some kinds), vegan butter, mashed avocado</p> <p><b>For sautéing/pan frying:</b> Olive oil, vegetable oil, canola oil, coconut oil, corn oil, avocado oil, peanut oil, grapeseed oil, sesame oil</p>
Milk	Plant milk alternatives* such as soy milk**, almond and other nut milks, oat milk, rice milk, coconut milk, flaxseed milk, hemp milk, pea milk
Buttermilk	Plant-based milk & an acid (1 cup plant-based milk + 1 tablespoon vinegar or lemon juice = 1 cup buttermilk)
Cheese	Nutritional yeast***, vegan cheese^
Cream cheese	Vegan yogurt, avocado, vegan cream cheese^, hummus, silken tofu

Original Item	Substitutions
Beef or pork broth / stock	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water</li> <li>• Vegetable broth/stock, vegetable consommé</li> <li>• Vegetable bouillon/base, vegetable bouillon cubes or powder</li> <li>• Seafood broth/stock, seafood bouillon cubes or powder</li> <li>• Water with soy sauce (1 cup water + 1 tablespoon soy sauce = 1 cup broth)</li> <li>• Water with miso paste (1 cup water + 1 tablespoon miso paste = 1 cup broth)</li> <li>• Water with tomato paste (1 cup water + 1 tablespoon tomato paste = 1 cup broth)</li> <li>• Red or white wine, depending on the flavor of the dish (Check that the wine is 'vegan' or 'animal free' because some wines use animal byproducts during processing)</li> </ul>
Flavorings †	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Worcestershire sauce</li> <li>• Liquid smoke</li> <li>• Soy sauce</li> <li>• Nutritional yeast</li> <li>• Miso powder / miso paste</li> <li>• Caesar seasoning ^^ †</li> <li>• Seasoned salts †</li> <li>• Mirin (sweet rice wine)</li> <li>• Sesame seeds</li> <li>• Green tea, black tea, other teas</li> <li>• Olives and capers</li> <li>• Dehydrated mushrooms &amp; chilies</li> <li>• Hot sauces †</li> <li>• Curry powder or curry paste †</li> <li>• Molasses</li> <li>• Pudding mixes, made with plant-based milk</li> <li>• Extracts: vanilla, lemon, almond, orange</li> <li>• Vinegars: white, apple cider, red wine, balsamic</li> <li>• Fermented foods: sauerkraut, kimchi, kombucha</li> </ul>

\* Plant milk alternatives do not naturally contain calcium and vitamin D, so look for options that have been fortified with both. Make sure the vitamin D comes from plant sources.

\*\* Soy milk is the closest substitute for cow's milk in terms of nutrition.

\*\*\* Nutritional yeast is a deactivated form of yeast that is rich in nutrients.



^ Vegan substitutions for cheese and cream cheese are similar in flavor and texture, but they may not melt the same way traditional cheese does.

^^ Caesar seasoning is a dry, powdered seasoning blend designed to imitate the traditional flavor of Caesar dressing and is often sold in vegan form

† Natural flavorings can be a common ingredient in some brands. Call food manufacturers to confirm the presence of mammal products in natural flavorings.

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# Cooking with Alpha-Gal Syndrome

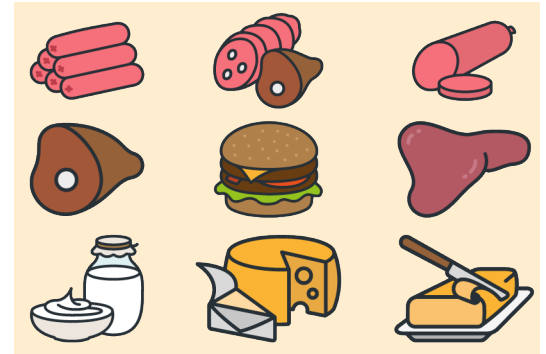
Alpha-gal syndrome (AGS) is a serious, potentially life-threatening allergic condition that can occur after a bite from the lone star tick. People with AGS have symptoms after eating meat and other products from mammals (cows, pigs, sheep, goats, rabbits). Because of this, AGS is sometimes called red meat allergy. Some people with AGS are also allergic to dairy and mammal byproducts. Symptoms may range from mild to life-threatening.

When cooking for a person with AGS, there are several important things to keep in mind.

## Trigger Foods

This is not a complete list. Other foods or ingredients may also trigger symptoms.

- Meat from mammals such as beef, pork, venison, lamb, bison, goat or rabbit
- Mammal organ meat such as liver, kidneys or sweetbreads
- Rocky mountain or prairie oysters
- Milk and dairy products (ice cream, yogurt, butter, cheese)
- Gelatin
- Meat broth, bouillon, stock, and gravy
- Butter, tallow, lard, or suet



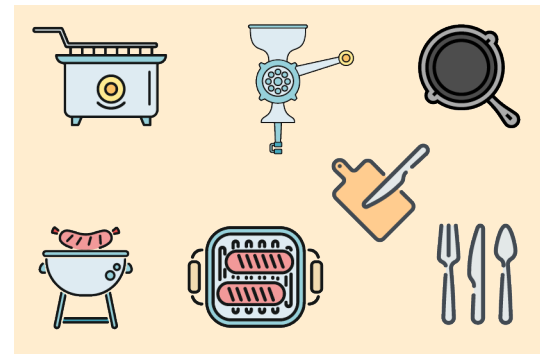
## Sensitivity

It's important to remember, not all people with AGS have reactions to every food with alpha-gal. Some are more sensitive than others.

Most people with AGS need to avoid red meat. Some also have sensitivity to dairy and dairy products. A small number must also avoid byproducts like gelatin.

Some may even need to avoid cross-contact (when the same cooking utensils or surfaces have touched both trigger foods and safe foods, contaminating a safe food). Areas of potential cross-contact include:

- Fry oil
- Meat grinders and slicers
- Cast iron pans
- Grills
- Cooking utensils, knives and surfaces



## Food Alternatives

The following foods do not contain alpha-gal but be aware of hidden ingredients. Refer to *Shopping for Alpha-Gal Syndrome (N1352)* guide sheet for more information about hidden ingredients. Alpha-gal sensitivity varies from person to person. Consult with your healthcare provider or registered dietitian to determine which specific foods need to be avoided and to develop a safe eating plan tailored to your needs.

- Poultry such as chicken, turkey, duck, emu, or quail
- Fish and seafood
- Eggs
- Fruits and vegetables
- Soy products
- Vegan dairy alternatives
- Legumes
- Nuts and seeds
- Grain foods



## Meeting Protein Needs

Some people may be concerned about getting enough protein if they must avoid red meat. Fortunately, most people can easily get enough protein. Adults should aim for 50-120 grams of protein a day. This should be split up evenly throughout the day. The table below lists foods that can help meet protein needs.

Food	Grams of protein per serving
Palm-sized portion of chicken	23
Palm-sized portion of fish	19
1 large egg	6
½ cup cooked beans or lentils	7-9
1 cup soy milk	7g
½ cup tofu	10-12
2 tablespoons peanut butter	7
¼ cup nuts	4-6
1 slice bread	3
⅓ cup rice or pasta	3



## Communicating About Allergies

When going out to eat, tell your server about foods and food ingredients that may trigger an AGS reaction. For more tips on dining out, check out the [resources available from Food Allergy Research & Education \(FARE\)](https://www.foodallergy.org/resources/dining-out) (<https://www.foodallergy.org/resources/dining-out>).

Make an easy-to-read list with allergen information to take to public places when eating.

Talk with your loved ones about AGS and make sure they understand your dietary restrictions and the risks.



## Cooking for Loved Ones

Talk with loved ones with AGS about foods that trigger reactions and brainstorm alternatives to prepare.

Communicate about their level of comfort with trying different foods or food ingredients that may contain alpha-gal to determine tolerance.

Learn about alpha-gal foods and ingredients, and read food labels every time.



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# Shopping Tips for Alpha-Gal Syndrome

Shopping for people with alpha-gal syndrome (AGS) can be challenging. There are several tips to make it easier.

1. Do not buy foods or byproducts of mammals, like beef, pork, etc.
2. Avoid food with alpha-gal that triggers an allergic reaction for you. These may include mammal meats and mammal byproducts. Remember AGS triggers can vary from person to person. Talk with your healthcare provider for individualized recommendations. Check out MU Extension publication *Alpha-Gal Awareness* (N1350) for more information about alpha-gal.
3. Read food labels and avoid ingredients that cause reactions.
4. If ingredients have vague labeling such as “natural flavors”, contact the manufacturer directly to ask if it contains alpha-gal ingredients.

## Hidden Ingredients

It is important to read the ingredient list every time. Foods that may seem safe may have hidden ingredients that can trigger an AGS reaction. Here are some examples. Alpha-gal sensitivity varies from person to person. Consult with your healthcare provider or registered dietitian to determine which specific foods and products need to be avoided and to develop a safe eating plan tailored to your needs

### Poultry

Food	Check for
Poultry sausages or brats	Beef or pork casings
Canned chicken	Beef or pork broth
Rotisserie chicken and lunch meat	Carrageenan
Pre-seasoned chicken	Beef or pork fat, stock, gravy, dairy or bouillon

### Snacks

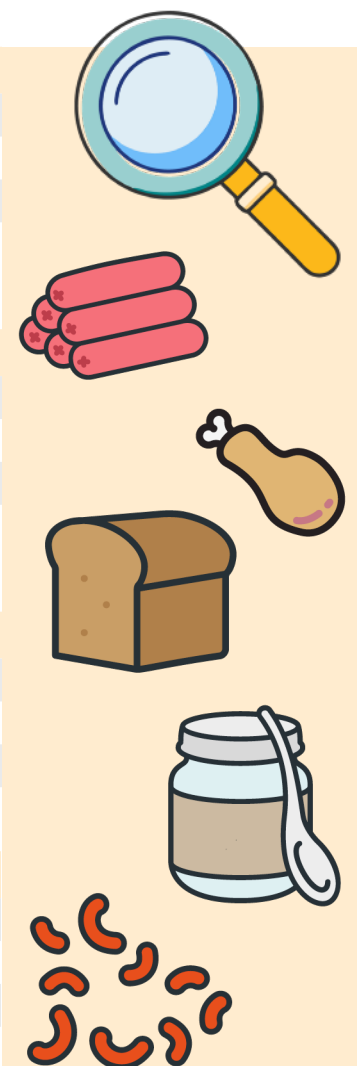
Food	Check for
Gummy products	Gelatin
Gelatin dessert with or without fruit	Gelatin
Pudding	Gelatin
Roasted nuts	Gelatin

### Grain Foods

Food	Check for
Breads	Butter, milk, lard
Toaster pastries	Gelatin
Cereals	Gelatin

### Food Pantry Staples

Food	Check for
Pasta or rice seasoning mixes	Dried beef or pork, broth or fat
Spice mixes	Beef or pork fat, broth, bouillon, stock, gravy, whey, powdered milk
Baked beans	Lard, bacon
Protein powder	Collagen, whey



## Common Ingredients to Watch Out For

- Gelatin
- Tallow (often beef fat)
- Glycerin\*\* (may be mammal-based or plant-based)
- Carrageenan (found in vegan and plant-based products)
- Lard
- Suet (mammal fat)
- Beef or pork fat
- Beef or pork stock
- Beef or pork broth
- Gravy
- Beef or pork bouillon
- Collagen\*\* (may be mammal-based or plant-based)

\*\* To verify if the ingredient is mammal- or plant-based, check with the manufacturer.



## Personal Items

Depending on the individual sensitivity, some people might have reactions to personal care items. If you are sensitive to non-food items, check for ingredients such as gelatine, glycerin, and collagen. Some of these are mammal-based, while others are plant-based. Check with the manufacturer to know for sure.

## Medication and Medical Treatments

Some medications and medical treatments could trigger an alpha-gal reaction. These may include over-the-counter and prescription dietary supplements, vaccines, ointments and creams, and pills with gel capsules among others. Be sure all your physicians (including dentist and eye doctor) and pharmacist are aware of your alpha-gal diagnosis.



## References:

CDC. (2024). Products That May Contain Alpha-Gal. Alpha-Gal Syndrome. [View source online.](#)

Macdougall, J.D., Thomas, K.O., & Iweala, O.I. (2022). The Meat of the Matter: Understanding and Managing Alpha-Gal Syndrome. *ImmunoTargets and Therapy*, 11, 37-54. [View source online.](#)

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