

Living with Food Allergies

By Bill Poorman

If you live with food allergies, you know the fear all too well. Eating or drinking the wrong thing can trigger a reaction. Maybe it's just itchiness and hives, but if it's an anaphylactic reaction, the body goes into shock and the throat swells shut, preventing breathing. Eating the wrong thing can literally be a life or death situation.

even if it does require a few adjustments.

You can often find most of the food products you purchased back home. The large groceries that cater to expats, such as Cold Storage and Jason's, stock many western goods. To fill the gaps, there are several natural food stores, such as Brown Rice Paradise, SuperNature and The Organic Grocer. If that's not enough, there

Oreos don't contain milk in the US, but here they are manufactured in facilities that also handle milk and peanuts. Thankfully, Singapore has a robust food labeling law.

As for cooking the food you've purchased, you might decide to enjoy the full expat experience and hire a helper. After avoiding this for several months, we decided to explore our options. During the interview process, we were quite clear about the severity of his food allergies. Several candidates turned us down, but we eventually found someone who has had no problem adjusting to our requirements.

In case of an allergic reaction, Singapore has world class health care and the fact that English is spoken here adds to the comfort level. Through our pediatrician, we found an allergist at National University Hospital. We've been through a round of annual allergy testing and the procedure matched our US experience. Emergency medicines, such as Epipens and asthma inhalers, are readily available, but we had to purchase them through the clinic pharmacy. They weren't available at neighborhood stores, such as Guardian or Watsons.

If your child has food allergies, you should find the schools quite aware and knowledgeable. Our experience is with the Singapore American School. Everyone there, including the nursing staff, teachers, administrators, counselors and fellow parents, has been attentive and supportive. Other international schools are similar in their approach.

Finally, Singapore is legendary for its hawker and restaurant food, but as anyone with food



allergies knows, you're taking a risk when you eat out. For our son, we just bring meals cooked at home. We've never been questioned about it, although we do always make a point to tell the server that he has food allergies.

Living with allergies is never simple or stress free. You or your loved ones might be sensitive to airborne food or environment allergens, including the annual haze. But hopefully living in Singapore with food allergies, in particular, won't seem as daunting now. Try to relax (at least a little bit) and enjoy the experience that is Singapore!

Photos by Danielle Segura and Bill Poorman

Bill Poorman is a stay-at-home dad who has lived in Singapore for just more than a year, but has lived with food allergies for more than ten years - and he has the gray hair to prove it.



Food allergies are scary and they can make a move to a new country intimidating. My family and I, we know. Our younger son has severe food allergies. When the opportunity came to move to Singapore, his safety was our top consideration. Now, after a year of research and experience here, I can tell you that living with food allergies in Singapore is possible,

are the online sources, such as iHerb.com and even Amazon. Finally, there's the old-fashioned expat method for getting products from home: haul them over in a suitcase.

One word of caution, though, about buying food off the shelf in Singapore: make sure to thoroughly check the label. Familiar brands might have different ingredients. For example,

Healthy Eating on a Budget, Singapore Style

By Lisa Lee

Whether you adhere to a dairy-free or gluten-free lifestyle or have committed to eating unprocessed foods most of the time, finding the wide variety of fresh produce easily available in North America, Australia and Europe can be somewhat of a challenge in Singapore. Given that most of Singapore's food is imported and that the shelf life of anything in the blistering tropical climate is a much shorter than elsewhere, finding fresh, healthy foods requires effort, especially if you wish to stick within a budget less than, say, your mortgage payment back home.

A visit to your local wet market is a great way to learn about your new home and experience

fresh food at a good value. Stalls at Tekka Market sell freshly grated coconut, as well as durians, mangos, rambutan and other tropical fruits. However, it is hard to trace the source of produce and it is rumored that some vendors automatically label items as "organic" in order to fetch a higher price, so buyer beware. (Organic produce is typically labeled with a sticker beginning with the number 9). Note that due to organic certification standards, nothing grown in Singapore can be certified organic because of the planes flying overhead.

If you have a green thumb and some balcony space, it's easy to grow your own herbs and leafy greens. If gardening is not your strength, a few dedicated and passionate farmers remain

in Singapore, who will make weekly deliveries for little or no cost with a minimum purchase amount. One of my favorite local pesticide-free farms is Quan Fa. These farmers passionately refrain from the use of pesticides and engage in healthy land stewardship practices. You can really taste the difference in their produce. Eating locally-grown produce saves money and is a great way to experiment with exotic vegetables such as wing beans, pandan leaves, and more familiar leafy greens such as bok choy and kai lan. Hays Dairy Farm offers daily (except Tuesdays) farm visits and produces fresh goat milk. Bollywood Veggies also offers tours of its fruit and vegetable farm and freshly-cooked meals. These farms are found in Kranji, which offers an entire farm visit trail.

If your family enjoys sustainable seafood and meats that are humanely slaughtered and raised without antibiotics, the options have improved in recent years. Sakura chicken, raised without the use of hormones or antibiotics, is even Jamie Oliver approved. There are several great butchers around town including The Butcher. The Alaska Guys offer wild caught Alaska salmon and Fishwives offers wild caught New Zealand salmon, along with a variety of quality meats. Redmart offers online ordering and delivery of New Zealand meats, in addition to a wide selection of household items and dry goods. Given the extraordinary value of land in Singapore, it's hard to find space for even a roaming chicken, but the folks at Freedom Range Eggs do just that.

NTUC Finest and Warehouse Club offer a wide variety of organic, in-season produce, Freedom Range eggs and organic Australian



milk, at the best prices in Singapore. While the stock is inconsistent, one can usually find organic staples such as cooking oils, dairy products, rice, cereals and snacks. For the occasional splurge, Cold Storage and Tanglin Market have varied and consistent inventory from around the world. Some days you just need that French wine or cheese and Wine Connection has both in quality and variety at decent prices. Both Supernature and Four Seasons offer a wide variety of organic foods and otherwise hard to find healthy toiletries and supplements. Brown Rice Paradise also stocks organic vegan foods, nuts and snacks.

For further details, see websites of organic/hormone free food vendors and the Environmental Working Group's "Dirty Dozen" and "Clean 15" lists. Check out the AAS website under "What's New" for a list of healthy food providers.

Photos by Lisa Lee

When Lisa Lee is not busy ensuring her young children are eating healthy, she practices international estate planning, probate, trusts, elder law and transactional real estate. She is a member of the Washington State Bar Association and other legal organizations.

