

# Your quick guide to: Celery Allergy

Celery (*Apium graveolens*) is part of the Apiaceae family and is a common cause of pollen related food allergy (please see our factsheet on pollen food syndrome for more information). Celery is often hidden in many foods, which led to it being mandatory in 2014 on food labels as part of the 14 main allergens.

## How common is celery allergy?

There is minimal research into celery allergy, and it is not clear how many people in the UK it affects. However, celery allergy in Europe has been reported between 2.8%-11.1% and seen in countries where raw celery is commonly consumed, such as France and Switzerland.

## What are the signs and symptoms?

### Pollen food syndrome

Reactions to celery are usually associated with cross reactions with pollen. This means if you have hayfever and developed mild symptoms over time then this may be the most likely cause. Celery is closely linked to birch and mugwort and is often referred to as birch mugwort celery syndrome where the immune system has mistaken the food for pollen. Symptoms are usually mild and can include itching or tingling in the mouth, lips or throat.

### Primary celery allergy

Primary celery allergy is not as common but may cause more severe reactions. Symptoms can range from mild reactions such as itching, swelling or hives to anaphylaxis (the more severe form of allergic reaction requiring the use of an adrenaline auto injector).

## What food should I avoid?

Celery may appear a simple food to avoid, however, it is hidden in many products and ingredients. Celeriac (*Apium graveolens rapaceum*) is a root that is closely associated with celery and should also be avoided. As celery is one of the 14 main allergens listed on food packaging in the UK, it is slightly easier to identify on product labels as it will be highlighted in

bold or underlined in the ingredient list of a product.

Celery can be eaten raw or cooked from the root, stalk and leaves. Celery seeds can be used in spice mixtures or used as celery salt to flavour food. You will find celery in:

- Stock cubes and gravy granules
- Soups, stews and broths
- Salads, dressings and sauces
- Spice mixes
- Condiments such as marmite
- Crisps
- Tomato juice and smoothies

One study has shown when celery root is heated extensively it still retains its allergenicity and so should be avoided. Furthermore, research has demonstrated that celery spice is allergenic to individuals with an allergy to raw celery despite being dried and powdered for use in spices.

## Diagnosing Celery Allergy

If you suspect you have had an allergic reaction to celery it is important to speak with your GP to ensure you have the right management plan and support. Your GP may then refer to an allergy specialist which may include skin prick testing and/or specific IgE blood testing.

*This Factsheet was prepared by Allergy UK's Clinical Team*

## References

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Moonesinghe, H., Kilburn, S., Mackenzie, H., Venter, C., Lee, K. and Dean, T., 2015. The prevalence of "novel" food allergens worldwide: a systematic review. *Clinical and Translational Allergy*, 5(3), pp.1-1.

## Key facts:

Celery allergy more commonly occurs when there is **cross reactions** with **pollen** such as birch and mugwort, also known birch mugwort celery syndrome.

Celery is hidden in many foods including **stock cubes, spice mixes** and **salad dressings**.

**Celeriac** is part of the celery family and should also be avoided.

## Allergy UK Helpline

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Call: 01322 619 898

Email: [info@allergyuk.org](mailto:info@allergyuk.org)

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