

What does may contain mean on sweets?

From the sweeties.net wiki

Many bags of sweets carry a line that says may contain, followed by an allergen such as nuts, milk or wheat. It is easy to misread. It does not mean the allergen is in the recipe. It means the maker cannot rule out that traces got in by accident.

Two different things on a label

A sweet's packaging can tell you about allergens in two quite different ways.

- **In the ingredients list.** If an allergen is part of the recipe, it must be listed in the ingredients and clearly emphasised, for example in bold, italics or a different colour. This applies to the 14 allergens named in UK food law, which include cereals containing gluten, milk, eggs, peanuts, tree nuts, soya, sesame, sulphites and others.
- **In a may contain warning.** This is precautionary allergen labelling. It tells you that traces of an allergen may have got into the product accidentally, even though it is not an ingredient.

Voluntary, not required

Food businesses are not legally required to use may contain warnings. The Food Standards Agency describes them as a voluntary way for businesses to communicate the risk of cross contamination, and says they should only be used where a risk assessment shows an unavoidable risk of cross contamination that cannot be sufficiently controlled.

In practice, the FSA has found that businesses are confused about when to use them. In 2022 it consulted on how to make these warnings clear and consistent, so that they are better understood by the people who rely on them.

What it means for you

- **A may contain warning** means there is a risk of traces. If you have a serious allergy to that allergen, it is usually safest to avoid the product and to follow your own medical advice.
- **No warning** is not a guarantee. Because the warning is voluntary, its absence does not prove a product is free of traces.
- **Free from labels** are different. The government's guidance is that labels such as free from or allergen free are a guarantee that the specified allergen is not in the product.
- **Vegan labels** are not allergy labels. A vegan product may still contain traces of milk or egg through cross contamination: see [are Jelly Babies vegan?](#)

Loose sweets and pick and mix

Loose sweets are not sold in labelled packs, so the rules work differently. Businesses must give you allergen information for any loose item that contains any of the 14 allergens, either in writing or out loud, and you can ask about ingredients and tell them about your allergy. Loose sweets can also be exposed to other sweets in the display and on shared scoops: see [which sweets contain nuts?](#) and [are sweets gluten free?](#)

If you have a food allergy, always read the full label, ask when in doubt, and follow the advice of your doctor or allergy specialist.

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