Allergens in tea: how to read the label

From the teas.co.uk wiki

Plain tea (black, green, white, oolong, pu-erh) contains none of the 14 regulated allergens. Neither does plain rooibos, peppermint or chamomile. The questions start when a product stops being one ingredient.

UK rules require the 14 major allergens to be emphasised in the ingredients list, usually in bold, whenever they are deliberately used. GOV.UK: ingredients list · Food allergy advice for consumers

Where allergens turn up in tea

Allergen	Where you might find it
Milk	Chai latte powders, matcha latte mixes, instant tea drinks, some "creamy" flavoured blends
Cereals containing gluten	Barley tea (mugicha), blends with barley or oats, some genmaicha-style products with added cereal
Nuts	Almond, pistachio or marzipan-flavoured blends, and "may contain" warnings from shared lines
Soya	Lecithin in chocolate pieces in chocolate teas, and in some latte powders
Sulphur dioxide / sulphites	Dried fruit pieces in fruit blends (apple, papaya, pineapple)
Sesame, celery, mustard	Rare, but possible in savoury or spiced blends

Two that surprise people: **barley tea is not gluten-free**, and **dried fruit in a fruit blend may be sulphited**.

"May contain" is a different statement

An emphasised ingredient means it is deliberately in the recipe. A "may contain" or "made in a factory that also handles" line is voluntary precautionary labelling about cross-contamination risk in the factory. It is not a promise that the allergen is present, and not a promise that it is absent.

If you are seriously allergic, treat those warnings as meaningful and ask the manufacturer if you need more detail.

"Vegan" does not mean "free from milk"

This one matters. A vegan label describes the recipe, not the risk of cross-contamination with animal-derived allergens during production. A product can be labelled vegan and still carry a "may contain milk" warning.

If you are choosing for a milk allergy rather than a dietary preference, read the allergen information, not the vegan badge.

Loose tea, scoops and cafés

- **Loose tea sold from a jar** or scooped in a shop is not pre-packed in the usual sense, so the allergen information is given in another way: ask staff, who must be able to tell you.
- **Shared scoops and infusers:** carry blends between jars.
- **In a café**, say the allergy clearly and ask about the whole drink: the tea, the milk, the syrup, the topping and the equipment. "No milk" is not the same as "no milk anywhere near it".

A quick routine before you buy

1. Check the exact product, size and market: recipes differ between formats and countries.
2. Read the full ingredients, not the front of the pack.
3. Look at the emphasised allergens, then any "may contain" line.
4. Keep the box while the tea is in a caddy, or photograph the label.
5. Re-check when you buy again: recipes change.

Our herbal and fruit infusions guide covers what is in those blends, and tea for vegans covers the dietary question separately.

If someone has a reaction, follow their emergency plan and get medical help. This page is general information about labelling, not advice about an individual allergy.

Common questions

Is tea gluten-free?
Plain tea is. Barley tea is not, and some blends contain barley, oats or malt.

Is there milk in a chai tea bag?
Not usually, chai bags are tea and spices. Chai *latte powders* are a different product and often contain milk powder.

Do tea bags themselves contain allergens?
The filter paper is not an allergen, though some bags contain plastics. That is a separate question: see plastic in tea bags.

What about "natural flavouring"?
It is a flavouring ingredient, and any allergen used in it must still be declared. See what natural flavouring means.

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