



Do you have a Food Allergy or Food Intolerance - August 2010

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Food Allergy or Food Intolerance is a term used widely for varied physiological responses associated with a particular food, or compounds found in a range of foods.

What is the difference between the two types?

Food Allergy

A Food allergy causes a very specific immunological reaction in the body, usually an adverse immune response to a food protein.

Common foods: peanuts, tree nuts, shellfish, fish, milk and eggs.

Other (non-food) common triggers - insect bites or stings, foods, medication and latex rubber.

These kinds of allergies occur when the body's immune system mistakenly identifies a protein as harmful. Some proteins, or fragments of proteins are resistant to digestion, so antibodies tag those that are not broken down in the digestive process called Immunoglobulin E (IgE). These tags fool the immune system into thinking that the protein is harmful. The immune system, thinking the organism (the individual) is under attack, triggers an allergic reaction. These reactions can range from mild to severe.

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| <u>Nose</u> | Swelling of the nasal mucosa (allergic rhinitis) |
| <u>Sinuses</u> | Allergic sinusitis |
| <u>Eyes</u> | Redness and itching of the conjunctiva (allergic conjunctivitis) |
| <u>Airways</u> | Sneezing, coughing, sometimes outright attacks of asthma. Swelling of the tongue or lips. Severe symptoms can result in: Anaphylactic shock associated with systemic widening of the blood vessels, resulting in low blood pressure, severe broncho-constriction to the point where the individual is unable to breathe. |
| <u>Ears</u> | Feeling of fullness, possibly pain, and impaired hearing due to the lack of Eustachian tube drainage. |
| <u>Skin</u> | Rashes such as eczema and hives |
| <u>Gastrointestinal Tract</u> | Abdominal pain, bloating, vomiting, diarrhea |

- Avoidance of all contact with offending food.
- EpiPen (an injectable form of adrenaline). Or wear some form of medical alert jewelry, or develop an emergency action plan, in accordance with their doctor.

Food Intolerance

Food intolerance on the other hand is an adverse reaction to some types of food or ingredients that occurs every time the food is eaten, but particularly if larger quantities are consumed. Food intolerance occurs when the body is unable to deal with certain types of foodstuff, this is usually because the body doesn't produce enough of the particular chemical or enzyme that's needed for digestion.

The lack of a specific enzyme in the body may lead to the build up of toxic by-products and histamine, which then mimic the symptoms of an allergy. This is called a 'pseudo-allergic' reaction.

Common examples:

- **Lactose Intolerance** is intolerance to cow's milk. Cow's milk contains a type of sugar called lactose; many people have a shortage or as we get older no longer produce the enzyme Lactase, which is normally made by the cells lining the small intestine. Without this enzyme they are unable to break down milk sugar into simpler forms that can be absorbed into the bloodstream. Lactose intolerance can cause very similar symptoms to Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS).

- **Gluten Intolerance** is intolerance to gluten in wheat. Gluten intolerance otherwise known as Coeliac Disease can often be misdiagnosed again as IBS until tested. This is an inflammatory condition of the digestive tract, caused by gluten - a protein found in wheat, rye, barley and oats. The condition causes gluten to damage the lining of the small intestine, which greatly reduces the ability of the gut to absorb adequate nutrients from food. In the worst cases, this can lead to severe malnutrition. It is not a contagious illness but is often genetic and the classic symptoms include lethargy, weight loss, vomiting and diarrhoea.

You maybe intolerant to any of the following:

- Milk, soya, apple, egg, pork, wheat, mushroom, chicken, lettuce, onion, beef, nuts, oat or naturally occurring chemical such as:
- Salicylate in many herbs, fruit and vegetables
- Cheeses and wine
- Monosodium Glutamate (MSG)
- Preservative, colouring, and flavourings
- Processed food

What are the Symptoms?

Food intolerance symptoms can be mild; from irritable bowel type syndrome - bloating, constipation or diarrhea - to skin complaints, headaches, mood swings and sleep disturbance as well as digestive, joint and muscular problems. To severe complications such as Malnutrition and damaged to the lining of the small intestine (if undiagnosed).

If you suffer from any of these symptoms always consult your doctor and be tested.

Gluten is found in a wide variety of foods- pastas, breads and breadcrumbs, many cereals, cookies, cakes, pretzels and numerous snack foods. Because it is in bread, people with coeliac disease cannot eat any sandwiches, pizza, wraps or foods that are breaded. This diet is particularly hard on children, and is difficult for some adults as well, but fortunately these days there are many supermarkets that sell gluten free products.

Coeliac sufferers are advised to eliminate wheat from their diet altogether and replace with rice, corn, millet, buckwheat or potatoes.

However people that maybe slightly sensitive to wheat, but not the gluten can try alternatives:

Wheat alternatives

Cereals - Oats, Millet, Barley, Rye, Quinoa, Porridge, Muesli

Pasta/Noodles - Buckwheat, Corn, Rice, Rice noodles

Crackers - Oatcakes, Rye cakes, Corn crackers, Rice crackers

Flours - Maize, Fillet, Buckwheat, Gram, Barley, Rice

Barley - Not just for winter soups and stews. Serve it in the same way as rice or use it as a base for energy-giving salads.

Oats - The basis of the ultimate power breakfast, porridge, oats are a complex carbohydrate that release energy slowly. Snack on oatcakes, flapjacks or oat biscuits. Use rolled oats as a topping for savory pies or wheat-free muesli based on oats in fruit crumbles.

Rye - The dense, firm breads made from rye are favoured in Eastern Europe. Try the dark, crumbly German rye bread 'pumpernickel' topped with avocado and smoked salmon. Look out for rye crackers, too.

Spelt - Spelt can be used in the same way as wheat flour. You can buy spelt flour, bread and pasta from health food shops.

Rice - Puffed rice, rice cakes, rice flour, rice pasta, rice crackers and, of course, plain rice (brown is best) will bulk up any wheat-free cupboard. Use rice in paellas and risottos.