

Food Intolerance- Why good food may not always be good for you.

When most of us think of food allergies we think of the common peanut allergy, sometimes shellfish, or even gluten, which results in Celiac Disease. Without immediate symptoms of anaphylaxis, hives, severe gastrointestinal pain or shortness of breath, most people often consider themselves allergy-free. While this could very well be the case, food intolerances also produce a reaction involving food and the immune system that affects up to 75% of the western population.

What Are the Symptoms of Food Intolerance?

Symptoms of food intolerance include, but are not limited to, nausea, diarrhea, abdominal pain, gas, bloating, headaches, muscle and joint pain, irritability, and fatigue. Unlike food allergies where the body produces IgE antibodies against the offending food, which results in an immediate reaction, food intolerances produce IgG antibodies, and can have a more delayed reaction sometimes taking up to 72 hours to appear.

Causes of Food Intolerance

Food intolerance can be inherited and can be caused by a specific food, a protein found in that food, or sometimes chemical ingredients added to enhance the colour or flavour of a certain food. Reactions can also be cumulative, where only upon repetitive exposure, will the body react, or familial, in which the body responds to foods from the same family. Another scenario is the body's lack of a certain enzyme to aid in the digestion and absorption of the food in question.

How are Food Intolerances Diagnosed?

Most people, when they suspect that they may have a food intolerance, will often start by keeping a food diary to record what they eat, and if and when they develop symptoms. If that doesn't lead to any definitive answers, then an elimination diet may be a good next step. For a period of two to three weeks, all of the common food allergens are removed from the diet to see if symptoms resolve. Following that, foods are re-introduced every two to three days, to identify any food intolerance. For faster and accurate results, a blood test for both IgE and IgG antibodies can be done. This test includes everything from all common food allergens to very specific spices and additives and has become a very popular diagnostic tool as most people not only want to know what they're intolerant to but also to what degree.

The Mind-Gut Connection

Epithelial cells that line the gut secrete serotonin, our feel good hormone. Often thought of as just a neurotransmitter important for mood, learning and sleep, it's important to note that only a small amount is produced in the brain and that up to 95% of it is actually made in the gut. This clearly illustrates the connection between the mind and the gut and why some people with food intolerances can suffer from irritability, anxiety, and even depression.

How are Food Intolerances Treated?

Depending on the severity of the food intolerance, one may need to avoid the problem food for several weeks or months until the intestines are healed and the immune system is settled. After this initial elimination, followed with a drastic reduction in the foods intake, most people can handle the problem food again in small amounts or on a rotated basis. Digestive enzymes, for digestion and absorption, and gastrointestinal support to reduce inflammation, also help to alleviate and prevent future symptoms.

Preventing Food Intolerances

There can definitely be too much of a good thing, and the key to ensuring optimal gut health is to not overdue it. Implement a diet rich in variety and try new things. Know what is in your food, and be sure to read labels. A really good resource for healthy, clean recipes is www.nourishingmeals.com. This blog is full of recipes free from gluten, dairy, and eggs, the top 3 food intolerances. Enjoy!