Food Allergy Or Food Intolerance

Did you know that food allergy, intolerance or sensitivity could be the cause of your health condition?

Including but not limited to Headaches, Migraine, Asthma, Sinusitis, Eczema, IBS, Psoriasis, Fatigue, Anxiety & Depression.



What is a Food Allergy?

A food allergy occurs when an individual ingests a food (usually containing a protein) that the body sees as a “foreign" or threatening substance - known as an ANTIGEN or ALLERGEN. The person's immune system responds by mounting an attack, producing large amounts of IgE antibodies, which attach themselves to specialised white blood cells. These cells release histamine and other inflammatory substances, producing "classic" allergic symptoms of swelling and inflammation. Conditions and symptoms such as rhinitis, asthma, wheezing, lip swelling, itchy skin, hives, and eczema involve this type of "allergic" reaction.

Food Sensitivities are reactions that are not consistent and do not necessarily result in definite specific antibody responses in the blood. They are difficult to pinpoint by traditional blood tests and scratch tests. Reactivity is however mediated by the immune system and results in the release of inflammatory mediators like histamine.
Most people are not aware that histamine and other inflammatory mediators can migrate to any area of the body causing inflammation in glands, joints, muscles, tendons, mucous membranes and skin and **are the direct cause of many health problems.**

What is Food Intolerance?

A food "intolerant" reaction also occurs when the body "reacts" to the ingestion of a food. This reaction however may or may not involve the immune system, and may be caused by a food protein, a starch or sugar molecule, other food component, or by a contaminant found in the food (e.g. food colouring, preservative etc). Many symptoms related to food intolerance are caused by a local inflammatory response in the gut; or a deficiency of enzymes needed to break down the food component; common intolerances of this type are to lactose and gluten.

It is quite common for people to have allergy/sensitivity and intolerance. This is why Coeliacs can avoid gluten and still suffer debilitating digestive symptoms.

Reactive food molecules. Caffeine, alcohol and fermented foods such as cheese, wine, yeast, chocolate, bacon, ham and salami contain biogenic amines including histamine and tyramine which can have an additive effect increasing the histamine load on the body; triggering headaches & elevating blood pressure.

So what can cause food sensitivity?

Food sensitivity could be re-named “poor digestion", as reactions to food are often the result of poor or compromised digestion!
Underlying digestive problems (e.g. low stomach acidity, gut bacterial overgrowth, a "leaky" or damaged gut lining (possibly caused by gluten), yeast infection or poor digestive enzyme production) are common "causes" of food sensitivity and must be addressed in order to correct the reactivity. It is usually large food particles that cause reactions, so proper breakdown of food (especially protein) via cooking, chewing & optimal digestion is vitally important. Stress can reduce levels of Secretory IgA; a class of protective antibodies found in the gut that teaches our immune system to be tolerant to foods. Low levels of IgA can lead to an increase in reactivity.

Signs and Symptoms of Food Reactivity

As mentioned earlier these can be quite diverse, depending on how long the person has been ingesting the food in question and how the body has "adapted". **Common symptoms include bloating, stomach cramping, diarrhoea or constipation - yes commonly known as "IBS"!**

Long term food sensitivities may produce symptoms totally unrelated to the digestive system and may include fatigue, joint and muscle aches, arthritis, anxiety, depression, sinusitis, headaches & migraine, hyperactivity in children, and even certain autoimmune disorders including Psoriasis, Ulcerative Colitis, Crohn’s disease and Lupus.

Identifying Reactive Foods is now made easier with Bio-Compatibility testing by hair analysis. A small hair sample is taken and sent to the lab for testing. Results are usually returned in 5 to 7 days.

Food antigens can be passed to infants via breast milk and also across the placenta before birth. Babies born with eczema or who suffer colic in their early days, are irritable and generally unsettled are an example of this.

Having the mother's hair tested at 12 weeks gestation for bio-compatible foods can help prevent the transfer of these antigens to the baby. This is especially important if Mum or Dad suffer eczema or immune mediated conditions.

There is a separate test for infants that can be done from birth onward that includes popular formulas, baby food, nappies, creams and lotions. A saliva sample can be used if the baby has very little hair.

Treatment

Treatment begins by eliminating reactive foods which will generally settle down the disturbing gastro-intestinal symptoms quite dramatically. A new diet of "safe" foods is prescribed and steps may be taken to improve liver function & digestion.

Herbs and nutritional supplements can be prescribed to settle inflammation, sooth, heal and repair the digestive tract if necessary. Sometimes digestive enzymes are needed for a while to improve digestion and probiotics are given to restore the balance of friendly bacteria and increase levels of Secretory IgA.

Other treatments may include supportive treatment to other target areas of the body; for example the lungs to assist with asthma, restoration of the sinus mucous membranes in chronic sinusitis, the adrenal glands for fatigue and the skin for eczema and psoriasis etc.

Are Foods Avoided Indefinitely?

Food sensitivities are best dealt with by avoidance of the offending food for a minimum of 6 months although most symptoms begin resolving within the first 4 weeks.
The hair can be tested again after 6 to 9 months. In this time some food sensitivities may have corrected, these foods can then be reintroduced gradually usually in "rotation" where problem foods are only eaten once every three to four days, instead of daily.
It is also possible for new allergies to develop, this may be due to eating too much of certain foods to compensate for what must be avoided.

The Importance of Testing

A basic elimination diet will exclude the most common reactive foods found in the general population ***however your illness and your sensitivities are as individual as you are***.

Only by eliminating the foods responsible for your illness can you expect your health to be fully restored.

The difference with Bio-Compatability testing is that you are given a list of "safe foods" to build your diet from. We take the guess work out and will even tell you what brands to buy!

People are often surprised that so called "healthy foods" are responsible for their condition e.g. broccoli, lettuce, chicken, olive oil, muesli, yoghurt, brown rice, apples, tuna, tomatoes or carrots.

For more information contact Linda Lowen at the
Highbury Natural Health Centre
24 Elliston Avenue
Highbury S.A. 5089
Ph: 8395 2836
Mb: 0415 630 844



Linda Lowen
ND, Adv. Dip Hom, Dip. Herb Med