

ARE YOU FOOD INTOLERANT?

Do you sometimes get headaches, suffer mood swings or experience fatigue after eating certain foods?

Do you crave specific foods and then feel awful after eating them?

Find out how the foods you eat most frequently could be the cause of your food intolerance...

What is food intolerance?

Food intolerance is when you have an adverse reaction to a certain food, but all allergy tests prove negative.

It is usually triggered by foods that are eaten very regularly, especially items such as wheat and milk.

Compared to a food allergy, food intolerance reactions are much slower and it is often difficult to say when it began because the symptoms are very mild at first and then gradually get worse.

Contrary to a food allergy which usually persists for many years and often for a lifetime, food intolerance is not life-threatening and may well disappear if the food is not eaten for a few months; but it will tend to recur if the food is ever eaten regularly again.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of food intolerance may appear a few hours after eating the food, the following day, or even up to three days later.

It is, however, difficult to make the link between the food and the symptoms, because the foods in question are often being eaten very frequently. It is also difficult to pinpoint a moment when the illness started.

The symptoms can begin with mild problems that most of us take for granted, such as headaches, excessive tiredness or frequent bouts of indigestion. Over the years, the symptoms get worse and the person gradually experiences more ill health.

The most common food intolerance symptoms include fatigue, headaches, Migraine, depression/anxiety, recurrent mouth ulcers, aching muscles and joints, digestive problems such as diarrhoea, constipation or bloating, itchy skin, and lowered immunity.

Food intolerance symptoms are not constant; they tend to come and go and vary in severity. Symptoms may be mild at first and gradually get worse over time.

Non-food factors such as stress, a strong flu or diarrhoea may play an important role in causing food intolerance and can greatly exacerbate the symptoms and make the individual more sensitive to the foods they are eating.

What causes it?

Triggers will often vary according to each individual's diet; they often tend to be foods that we eat very regularly or foods that we usually crave.

Common triggers include dairy products, wheat, eggs, nightshade family vegetables (potatoes, tomatoes, peppers and aubergines), and citrus fruits.

What can I do?

There is no quick solution for food intolerance, mainly due to the fact that what triggers it is hard to pin point.

The standard method used to diagnose food intolerance is the *elimination diet*, where all or most of the commonly eaten foods are avoided for a period of one to three weeks. All the offending foods have to be cut out simultaneously for an improvement in health to occur. If an improvement in health occurs, then foods are reintroduced individually and their effects are assessed.

The individual often feels a lot worse initially, but then recovers fairly spectacularly on day six or seven. Occasionally the process takes a little longer, but if there is no improvement after about three weeks, then it is not necessary to continue with the diet.

The elimination diet is best carried out under the supervision of a qualified practitioner (i.e. doctor or nutritionist) in order to effectively assess results and avoid malnourishment.

Food Substitutes

These are some substitutes for some common triggers of food intolerance:

Cow's Milk substitutes:

- Goat's milk – It is better to boil goat's milk before giving it to children.
- Soya milk – It is obtainable from health food shops and some supermarkets. However, it is advisable not to eat too much of any soya product because over use can trigger other allergic/intolerant reactions.
- Rice milk – sold in health foods shops and some supermarkets.
- Ground almonds or cashews – Can be made into a cream substitute by mixing them to a paste with water and a little honey.

Wheat Bread substitutes:

- Gluten-free bread – May be available at some health food shops.
- Rye bread – Make sure there is no wheat added in the ingredients.
- Rye crispbread
- Oatcakes – Oats are preferable to rye since they are less likely to cross-react with wheat.
- Rice cakes or rice crackers – available from health food shops or some supermarkets. They are made from puffed grains of rice.

Butter and Cheese substitutes:

- Margarine – Be sure it does not contain any hydrogenated oils, which are very harmful to health. Also, some brands (e.g. Flora)

contain milk in the ingredients, which you should watch out for if you are intolerant to milk.

- Tahini – Can be used as a spread in sandwiches or as a dip.
- Soya-based cheese – It is available in some health food shops.
- Hummous – if it is made with a thick consistency, it can make a very good sandwich filling or spread.

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