



# HEALTH: Food allergy or intolerance? How can you tell the difference?

**ARE YOU SUFFERING FROM SYMPTOMS THAT YOU SUSPECT MAY BE RELATED TO A FOOD INTOLERANCE OR ALLERGY?**

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Are you suffering from symptoms that you suspect may be related to a food intolerance or allergy? If so this may be very distressing for you, especially if your symptoms are affecting your quality of life.

Although both can cause debilitating symptoms, it's useful to understand the difference between a food allergy versus a food intolerance. The differences are often misunderstood because many

people believe they're the same; the truth is, they're not. These are two separate conditions. So, read on to learn more about the difference between a food intolerance and allergy and what you can do to help with your symptoms.

A food allergy is an immune system response when the body mistakes a particular food as a harmful substance.

Symptoms of an allergic reaction can manifest in a minor way as rashes, itching, hives, or swelling, or in a severe way it can trigger anaphylaxis shock. Obviously this is a medical emergency and you must seek the help of a medical professional.

A food intolerance is often a delayed reaction which, although uncomfortable and unpleasant, is not life-threatening.

A food intolerance is often caused by a difficulty digesting certain foods with symptoms emerging hours or days later. Depending on the type of food intolerance, the immune system can sometimes identify food protein particles as 'foreign' when they enter the blood stream and produce IgG antibodies to 'attack' the food in question.

Because food intolerances are often delayed in their response they can be difficult to diagnose.

One of the most common food intolerances is lactose intolerance. This occurs when there is a deficiency in the digestive enzyme lactase so the lactose in milk isn't digested well. Gluten can also be problematic for some people, even without the presence of coeliac disease.

In general though, adverse food reactions can be classified as immune and nonimmune.

The immune category can be further subdivided into allergies and sensitivities. Food sensitivities are frequently confused with food allergies although they involve different immune mechanisms and have different characteristics. Generally food intolerances stem from multiple reasons, the main one being a lack of certain enzymes, whereas food allergies or sensitivities generally involve the immune system.

Food allergy symptoms can vary from mild to severe and usually appear within minutes of consuming the offending food.

The most common food allergy signs and symptoms include:

- \* Tingling or itching in the mouth.
- \* Hives, itching or eczema.
- \* Swelling of the lips, face, tongue and throat or other parts of the body.
- \* Wheezing, nasal congestion or trouble breathing.
- \* Abdominal pain, diarrhoea, nausea or vomiting.
- \* Dizziness, light-headedness or fainting.
- \* In severe cases, the immune system may trigger a response throughout the whole body, causing anaphylactic shock which can be life threatening and immediate medical attention is needed.

You may experience minor symptoms but, in some cases, if you consume the culprit food once again, it could lead to a more severe reaction. The way your body responds to a food allergy can be unpredictable.

If you have had an allergic reaction to a food it is important to see your GP, they can refer you to an allergy specialist who can carry out the relevant tests to determine if it is a true allergy you experienced.

You may see "allergy tests" advertised online, be cautious when it comes to buying tests on the Internet that claim they test for food allergies. If you haven't consumed the culprit food for quite some time, the test may say that you have no reaction to it. This may cause serious consequences if you then eat the trigger food.

Some of the most common allergy causing foods:

- \* Egg
- \* Dairy
- \* Peanut
- \* Soy
- \* Wheat
- \* Tree Nut
- \* Shellfish
- \* Fish
- \* Sesame.

The most common food intolerance signs and symptoms include:

- \* Abdominal pain or cramping
- \* Gas and bloating
- \* Vomiting
- \* Tiredness
- \* Headaches and migraines
- \* Skin issues, such as acne, eczema, psoriasis or urticaria
- \* Constipation or diarrhoea
- \* Anxiety or depression
- \* Respiratory issues, such as rhinitis and sinusitis
- \* Joint pain, swelling, fibromyalgia and arthritis

The above symptoms can take hours or up to 3 days to appear. Therefore, it can be difficult to pinpoint your reaction, especially if a person has more than one food trigger.

#### Common Food Intolerances

Lactose: This is a sugar in cow's milk that requires the enzyme lactase to be broken down into simple sugars for absorption in the gastrointestinal tract.

Wheat and or gluten: (not to be mistaken for coeliac disease).

Sucrose or maltose: Both are sugars requiring enzymes for digestion into simple sugars for absorption.

Histamine and tyramine: These are substances created in the fermentation process in aged cheeses, processed meats, beer, wine, vinegars, and soy sauce. They naturally occur in some foods as well.

- Salicylate: This is a salt contained in some foods and is used to make aspirin.
  - Tartrazine: This is an artificial food colour used in food.
  - Benzoates, butylhydroxyanisol (BHA), butylhydroxytoluene (BHT), sulphites: These are preservatives added to foods.
  - Monosodium glutamate (MSG): This is a naturally occurring or added flavour enhancer in foods.
- Other food dyes: These are colour additives used in food.

Steps you can take to start weeding Out the Culprits!

While most food intolerances are found through trial and error, there are things you can do to help identify and isolate these intolerances.

Following identification of food intolerances, avoidance of the offending foods is the short-term recommendation, but in the long term, it's important to investigate the underlying cause of the intolerance.

This is where nutritional therapy can be very helpful, not only in identifying the triggering foods through an elimination diet or food intolerance testing, but also in helping to find the underlying cause of the intolerance and putting a plan together to eliminate the cause and heal the gut.

Even before seeing a professional, you can start putting steps in place to help identify the offending foods.

- Start a food diary
- Identify offending foods.
- Avoid the offending food for four to six weeks. If you experience symptoms, you know there's intolerance to that particular food and the recommendation is to avoid it and rechallenge again in another few weeks.

Are you struggling with food intolerances and no matter how hard you try you just can't identify the culprit? You may benefit from a food intolerance test, or an elimination diet, both available in the clinic. why not schedule in an appointment with The Nutri Coach! My clinic is back open and I am taking bookings for new and existing clients. Contact details below are below.

Debbie Devane from The Nutri Coach is a qualified Nutritional Therapist and health & lifestyle coach, Debbie runs her clinic from the Glenard Clinic in Mountmellick and also offers one to one and group online consultations. Debbie is also Nutritionist to the Offaly GAA senior footballers. For more information or to make an appointment email Debbie at [info@thenutricoach.ie](mailto:info@thenutricoach.ie)

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