

Food intolerance is not the same as Food Allergy

So What Exactly is Food Intolerance?

The complex way food affects our everyday lives is an emerging area and diagnosing the cause of symptoms which seem to be 'unexplained' is often difficult. People who experience some of the symptoms of food intolerance are often led by the medical profession and the media to believe that their condition is 'all in the mind' and are treated for the physical manifestation of the condition rather than the cause. However there are now answers to your questions and ways to identify the cause of your symptoms leading to long term relief.

Although not life threatening like food allergy, food intolerance should ever be underestimated as its impact on sufferers can be significant, severely impacting on their ability to live normal healthy lives. Food intolerance is extremely widespread and it is estimated that 45% of the population could be affected. Many people with food intolerance experience more than one symptom. Symptoms can often be vague and the root cause of the problem, food, is not always correctly diagnosed. Sufferers often complain of seeming to be in a 'fog', feeling bloated and being tired all the time.

Essentially food intolerance is your body's abnormal reaction to certain foods which can manifest itself in a number of ways. Some people will have one symptom such as a severe headache whilst others will be unfortunate to experience irritable bowel syndrome, migraine and skin or respiratory conditions. Realising that the food you eat is a catalyst for particular symptoms is not easy when, unlike the immediate reactive symptoms of food allergy, food intolerance symptoms often appear hours or even days later. In fact, following the elimination of problem foods, many sufferers have realised that they had been experiencing minor symptoms as a result of intolerance for their entire lives.

Food allergy is not the same as food intolerance. But the two are frequently confused.

A classical food allergy (such as peanut or shellfish allergy) is usually characterised by an immediate and often severe reaction of the immune system to exposure to a specific food.

The symptoms of food allergy include sneezing, rashes, skin irritation, swelling, runny nose, fatigue, diarrhoea and vomiting. Normally symptoms occur within a few minutes of eating or coming in to contact with the offending food, although they can be delayed by up to two hours.

Food allergy is quite rare with only about 2.5% of the population being diagnosed with the condition. The most common instances of food allergy are to peanuts, tree nuts (almonds and brazils), eggs, milk, fish and shellfish.

When exposed to the source of food allergy the body makes specific antibodies (IgE) to 'fight off' the allergens found in these foods. When the food is next eaten it triggers an immune system response which results in the release of histamine and other naturally occurring chemicals in the body. Allergic reactions to food can vary considerably in their severity and some can be fatal.

Food intolerance and food allergy in brief

Food Intolerance

- Reactions are usually delayed and symptoms may take several days to appear
- You can be intolerant to several different food groups at the same time
- Sufferers can experience multiple symptoms, from migraine to bloating, diarrhoea, lethargy and a generally feeling un well

Food Allergy

- Reactions usually occur quickly, with a maximum of 2 hours after exposure to the 'reactive' food
- The body's IgE immune system is activated by the immediate ingestion of the reactive food
- Symptoms include: difficulty breathing, rashes, swelling, runny nose and anaphylactic shock these can potentially be life threatening.