

## **Food Sensitivities and Allergies**

**What are food allergies, intolerances and sensitivities?** A **food allergy** is a reaction to a food that can be measured in the body's immune system (an IgG or IgE) reaction. Approximately 1-2% of the population demonstrates this type of reactivity. It can be measured accurately through "scratch tests" or blood tests that measure immune system response. Symptoms may include runny nose, watery eyes, throat mucous as well as hives, abdominal cramping, diarrhea or anaphylaxis. Often people with food intolerances or sensitivities do not show an observable immune system reaction.

**Food intolerances and sensitivities** are much broader terms than food allergy and may include many types of symptoms correlated with food reactivity which may not result in an immune system reaction. People may lack the enzymes needed to break down certain foods –this is an example of **food intolerance**. Or, the body may react to a food sensitivity in such a way as to create diffuse symptoms such as fatigue, mental fogginess, breathing difficulties, headaches, joint pain, chronic ear infections, etc. It is often difficult to determine which foods cause certain reactions because of the time delay in reactions. The "gold standard" for determining food intolerances and sensitivities is the elimination of foods from the diet and the subsequent monitoring of body reactions.

**What are some of the most common food sensitivities?** Common food sensitivities are wheat, dairy products, commercial eggs, soy, corn, potatoes, tomatoes, peanuts, red meat and many citrus fruits. Other foods that may be inflammatory for people are fried foods, food dyes, dried fruit, fruit juices, alcohol, caffeine (including chocolate), tea, coffee, artificial sweeteners, bananas, food additives and preservatives, onions, pickled herring and some vinegars.

**People may react to foods based on their levels of endocrine function, digestive effectiveness, immune system activity and individual and family history.** The more often a person is exposed to a specific kind of food, the more he or she is likely to be prone to sensitivities. Clinically, some of the most common "food cravings" are those which may be most harmful for our bodies. So, it is important to obtain a complete picture of each person before determining a particular pattern of reactivity to foods or other environmental stressors.

**What tests are available?** There are several methods for diagnosing food reactions. The purpose of testing is to determine a reliable and reproducible way to assess body reactions. A comprehensive health history and food diary are often helpful.

Immune system reactions can be tested using RAST, PRIST, RASP ELISA, ELISA/ACT and FICA blood tests. Scratch tests are also used to measure immune reaction, but may be less reliable in young children.

Cytotoxic, sublingual, neutralization and scratch testing rely, in part, upon reproducing allergic (immune) system reactions. As noted, due to individual characteristics and timing--immune responses alone, may not be entirely accurate. Kinesiology (muscle testing) gives immediate but not always clinically reproducible results. EAV testing relies upon the electrical conductivity of the body –i.e. the more resistance, the more sensitive the body is to the particular food being tested.

A wide variety of food sensitivity tests are available –with a wide variety of accuracy, sensitivity, specificity, cost, risk, suitability and comfort. It is important to consult your health care practitioner to determine the most appropriate testing method for your particular symptoms and conditions.