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Health

Food intolerances – fact or fiction?

Can cutting out certain foods from your diet really make you healthier?

Words Jennifer Dunkerley

Tired? Bloating? Itchy skin? Latest research shows that these common health problems could be caused by certain foods you're eating. Twelve million Brits claim to have a food intolerance, yet less than a quarter of those have had it medically diagnosed.

Food intolerances are different from allergies. An allergic reaction happens rapidly, and can be triggered by even the tiniest amount of allergen attacking your immune system. This can result in rashes, breathing difficulties, and in extreme cases, death. But food intolerances occur when the body is unable to deal with a certain type of food. This is usually because the body doesn't produce enough of the particular chemical or enzyme that's needed for digestion of that food. Reactions from intolerances are likely to be less severe than with allergies.

Nutritional expert **Patrick Holford** says that people can spend years suffering unnecessarily from hidden food intolerances – because most doctors aren't aware that symptoms can be cured by avoiding particular types of foods.

'People who have chronic tiredness, digestive problems, eczema, asthma or aching joints may have an allergy or intolerance,' he says. 'Likewise, headaches or depression are often symptoms of a hidden food intolerance. People might not want to bother their doctor about these symptoms, and will just blame it on their hectic lifestyles.'

But before you self-diagnose, GMTV's Dr Hilary Jones suggests you see your doctor first.

'Whatever you do, don't self-diagnose, as adopting unhealthy eating patterns and cutting out whole food groups without proper medical advice can lead

to problems like nutrient deficiency, osteoporosis and mental retardation.'

Get yourself tested

Tests for food intolerances aren't currently available on the NHS, but you can get tested privately.

Reveal consulted GP Dr Hilary Jones, who recommends the York Test to his patients. 'The York Test works by testing a sample of your

blood on over 130 potential culprit foods,' he says. 'And by initially having the cheaper indicator test, you can determine your suitability for the full test – so you don't have to fork out for the full York Test straightaway.'

INTOLERANCE TESTING OPTIONS

- York Test: an indicator test costs £50 and the full York Test 113 FoodSCAN is £250, with £200 refunded if results come back negative. For more information, see www.yorktest.com or call 0800 074 6185.
- Bionetics: an alternative to the York Test, this tests a strand of your hair for 115 of the most common problem food intolerances at a cost of £48. Visit www.bionetics.co.uk.



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Gluten intolerance

Celebrity sufferer: Carol Vorderman

Gluten, a mixture of proteins gliadin and glutenin, which are found in wheat and other flours, can cause health problems for many people. It can be found in everything from breads to salad dressings, ketchups and ice-creams too.

Symptoms of gluten intolerance

can include vomiting, diarrhoea and breathlessness. The condition can also lead to anaemia, abdominal discomfort, mouth ulcers and migraines. Not surprisingly, sales of gluten-free items in supermarkets have risen by around 120 per cent in the past five years.

Lactose intolerance

Celebrity sufferer: Rachel Hunter

Adverse reactions to dairy products are caused by intolerance to lactose, which is the sugar in milk. This stems from a lack of lactase, an enzyme required to break down milk in our stomach, causing bloating, nausea, diarrhoea and flatulence. Some mild sufferers do

produce small amounts of lactase, so they can tolerate some milk or other dairy products. While everyone is born with enough lactase to cope with milk as a baby, it depletes and often disappears over time. Dairy products are also a contributing factor.

Wheat intolerance

Celebrity sufferers: Geri Halliwell, Rachel Weisz

The Grain Information Service says around 65,000 people in the UK suffer from a wheat intolerance. Many people identify wheat as a trigger for symptoms including fatigue, breathlessness, bloating, wind, abdominal pain, diarrhoea, vomiting and skin problems. Be

careful though – by cutting out wheat (including bread, pasta, noodles and cereals), you lose a vital source of vitamin E, which is an essential guard against heart disease and cancer. To compensate, top up your levels of vitamin E by eating pulses and green vegetables.

CASE STUDY

'My bloated belly is gone'

Olympic heptathlete **Denise Lewis, 35, from West Bromwich, West Midlands, says:**

I've suffered from tiredness, cramps and irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) for the past 13 years, and it's affected my performance on and off the track.

My doctor referred me for lots of different tests, including a colonoscopy, but when these came back clear, I was convinced it was something I was eating. I tried to work out what was wrong with me and stopped eating a range of foods, but nothing worked. When I heard about the York Test, I was keen to give it a go.

The test showed I was intolerant to cow's milk, egg yolk and garlic. Garlic was especially hard to give up as I love it, but since eliminating these things from my diet I've not suffered my usual bloating and stomach cramps, I have more energy, and generally feel brighter and lighter.



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