

Food Allergies & Sensitivities

Why Test for Food Allergies?

Good health has a lot to do with maintaining balance; the right balance of work and play, the right balance of nutrients in the diet, and the right kinds of foods. Undiagnosed food allergies may contribute to symptoms and biochemical changes that decrease quality of life eventually lead to illness.

A food allergy test measures your immune system's reaction to a variety of foods. It is a valuable tool which helps to develop a very specific nutritional plan for you, and to identify foods that are compounding your allergic symptoms.

What is a Food Allergy?

A food allergy is an adverse immune response to a food protein. When an allergic reaction occurs, the immune system reacts by releasing antibodies. The foods and inhaled particles that provoke the release of antibodies are called 'allergens'.

Two commonly produced antibodies are IgG (immunoglobulin G) and IgE (immunoglobulin E). Life threatening food allergies are classic hypersensitivity reactions mediated by immunoglobulin E (IgE) such as: shellfish or peanuts.

Delayed food allergies or food sensitivities are not life threatening and are mediated by immunoglobulin G (IgG) such as: wheat gluten, dairy products, eggs, soy, citrus. These are the food sensitivities that decrease everyday quality of life, even if they're not classified as medical emergencies. While the above mentioned foods are among the most common IgG allergies, a person can develop an allergy to virtually any food protein.

Conditions Related to IgG Allergies

IgG allergic reactions occur over several hours or days. With an IgG allergic reaction, IgG antibodies attach themselves to the allergen and create an 'antibody-allergen complex'. These complexes are normally removed by special cells in the liver and spleen called macrophages, but if they are present in large numbers and the allergen continues to be consumed, the body isn't able to remove them fast enough. These allergen-antibody complexes accumulate and are deposited in body tissues, causing the release of inflammation causing chemicals which contribute to a variety of health problems.

Symptoms and Diseases Associated with Food Allergy and Intolerances

System	Symptoms/disease
Gastrointestinal	Acid reflux, celiac disease, chronic diarrhea, Crohn's disease, colic (babies), indigestion, nausea, vomiting, constipation, gas, gastritis, irritable bowel syndrome, nutrient malabsorption, ulcerative colitis, ulcers
Genitourinary	Bed wetting, bladder infections, nephritic syndrome, frequent urination
Immune	Ear infections, chronic colds and flu's
Musculoskeletal	Joint pain, muscle pain, rheumatoid arthritis
Respiratory	Asthma, chronic lung infections, sinusitis, nasal congestion, nasal polyps
Skin	Eczema, psoriasis, hives, red itchy eyes, itchy skin
Mental / Emotional	Hyperactivity, depression, anxiety, inability to concentrate
Miscellaneous	Migraine headaches

Conditions Related to IgE Allergies

IgE reactions occur within minutes or hours of exposure and release inflammation causing chemicals like histamine, which are responsible for most of the symptoms associated with IgE allergic reactions: **Redness and swelling** (due to the release of inflammation-causing chemicals like histamine which cause the blood vessels to dilate), **Tightening of airways** (release of inflammation-causing chemicals like histamine can cause airway congestion and constriction), **Itching** (release of inflammation-causing chemicals can cause stimulation of nerve endings, which produce pain and itching on the skin surface).

How are Food Allergies Tested?

While IgE allergies are usually quite easy to diagnose because they cause an immediate and severe allergic reaction, IgG allergies are delayed hours or days after exposure and can be caused by multiple foods. Therefore IgG allergies can be very difficult to identify without testing.

IgG allergy testing requires a simple finger prick. The blood from the finger prick is used to saturate test strips which are sent to the lab by your doctor. The laboratory tests these dried blood spots for IgG antibodies to a variety of different foods.

IgG Delayed Allergic Reactions

IgG reactions develop slowly, up to several hours or days after exposure to a food allergen, so testing is often the only way of determining which foods are the culprits. The allergy test report graphs your immune response to each of the foods tested. Reactions are categorized as *no*, *low*, *moderate* or *high*. It may be suggested that you eliminate moderately reactive foods from your diet for a certain amount of time, and highly reactive foods for a longer period of time. It is often possible to reintroduce these foods after the elimination period has ended and without symptoms recurring. However, it is important to follow your given protocol on the reintroduction of potential allergens.

What is “Leaky Gut Syndrome”?

“Leaky gut syndrome” can promote the development of food allergies, and can itself be caused by food allergies. An overload of antibody-allergen complexes causes inflammation in the lining of the gut, which causes the gut to 'leak'. This 'leaky gut' (intestinal hyperpermeability) allows more antibody-allergen complexes to escape into tissues, which provokes more inflammatory reactions that are harmful to the body. Thus, anyone with a leaky gut should be tested for food allergies and anyone with a lot of allergies usually needs to be treated for leaky gut. Therefore, treatments may be given for your digestive system in addition to any recommended dietary changes.

What about Lactose Intolerance?

An intolerance is different than a food allergy or sensitivity! Food intolerances may mimic the symptoms of a food allergy but are not the direct result of an antibody-antigen reaction. For example, lactose intolerance is due to a deficiency in the enzyme lactase, the enzyme responsible for the digestion of the milk sugar lactose. Adverse reactions to food additives may also be defined as food intolerance. Sometimes a lack of digestive enzymes or stomach acid can result in a food intolerance. Food intolerances cause negative reactions to foods, but they are not classical allergies to food proteins.