

Demystifying Food Allergy and Intolerance?

How often do you hear people say that they are allergic to certain foods? It seems more common today compared with 10 years ago.

A **true food allergy** is an immune response to the protein in the particular food item. True food allergies can be very dramatic and even life threatening. Onset of symptoms is usually fast, however, some immune reactions are delayed by hours or days after exposure. A typical immune response to a food allergen can include any or all of the following:

- skin itching and eczema,
- swelling of body tissues,
- vomiting,
- diarrhoea, and
- breathing difficulties

A severe allergic reaction can result in potentially life threatening anaphylaxis, and requires immediate attention.

Foods that commonly cause allergy in young children include: dairy, wheat, egg, peanuts, tree nuts, soy seeds and seafood. Most children who are allergic to some foods grow out of it by three years of age.

True food allergy should be confirmed by immunological testing through Skin Prick and blood tests (RAST), these are reliable and scientifically validated, and are carried out by a medical practitioner. However, unconventional tests for allergy are becoming more popular with alternative health practitioners, these include: vega testing, kinesiology, iridology, pulse testing and Alcat testing. These tests should be used with caution as they can result in an incorrect diagnosis and lead people to engage in inappropriate dietary restrictions.

In contrast, **food intolerance** does not produce an immune response (allergy). Some people may be sensitive to chemicals naturally occurring in food such as:

- *Glutamates* - found in strong cheeses such as parmesan & camembert, tomatoes, soy sauce and mushrooms,
- *Amines* - found in pineapples, bananas, red & white wine, baked meat, chocolate, citrus fruits and mature cheeses) and,
- *Salicylates* - found in some fruits, herbs and aspirin.

Symptoms of food intolerance include: migraine headaches (amines), skin rashes, stomach upset and irritable bowel. Food elimination diets are a reliable way to identify the foods causing intolerance, and should be conducted under the guidance of an Accredited Practising Dietitian or a Medical Practitioner.

Other adverse reaction to food can be caused by enzyme deficiency, Eg. lactose intolerance is caused by lactase deficiency. Food preservatives,

including sulphites are known to make asthma symptoms worse. Food additives including flavours and colourings can cause food intolerance in sensitive people, generally if a person is sensitive to one food colour, they will be sensitive to all food colours.

Food additives and sugary foods have been blamed in the popular press for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD); however, there is no evidence to suggest that these items cause ADHD. Some, but not all children will benefit from cutting out these foods. Families affected by ADHD are encouraged to eat well by following the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating, found at:

<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/health-publth-strateg-food-guide-index.htm>

Coeliac disease is not food allergy or food intolerance. People with Coeliac disease have an immune response to gluten, a protein in wheat. The immune response causes inflammation of the intestines, resulting in poor absorption of nutrients. Symptoms include: stomach upset, weight loss, fatigue and anaemia. A gluten free diet is recommended for people with Coeliac disease, gluten is found in many grains including wheat, rye, barley

Information for the editor of the Pallerang Bulletin:

The information in the above article was sourced from the following scientific sources:

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- Mullins R (2007). Paediatric food allergy trends in a community-based specialist allergy practice, 1995-2006. *Medical Journal of Australia, 186, number 12. 18 June 2007.*
- Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy Inc (ASCIA): *Unorthodox Techniques for the Diagnosis and Treatment of Allergy, Asthma and Immune Disorders.* www.allergy.org.au
- ASCIA: *Anaphylaxis Training Resources for educators and allied health professionals.* www.allergy.org.au