Healthy Living

Information from the American Chiropractic Association & Dr. Joel Fugleberg

Understanding Food Allergies

Food allergies occur if your immune system has an abnormal response to an otherwise harmless food or food component. Once the immune system mistakenly decides that a particular food is dangerous, it creates specific antibodies to it. The next time you eat that food, the immune system releases massive amounts of neutralizing chemicals, including histamine, to protect the body. These chemicals trigger a cascade of allergic symptoms that can affect the respiratory system, gastrointestinal tract, skin, and/or cardiovascular system.

Food allergy patterns in adults often differ from those in children. The most common foods to cause allergies in adults are shrimp, lobster, crab, and other shellfish; peanuts; walnuts and other tree nuts; fish; and eggs.

In children, eggs, milk, peanuts, soy, and wheat are the main culprits. Children typically outgrow these allergies, whereas allergies to peanuts, tree nuts, fish, and shrimp usually are not outgrown. Unlike children, adults usually do not lose their allergies.

According to researchers from the National Institutes of Health, you're more likely to develop food allergies if several members of your family have allergies. This includes any type of allergy—even hay fever.

What are the common symptoms of food allergies?

Symptoms of a food allergy can include:

- Coughing
- Tingling in the mouth
- Swelling in the tongue and throat
- Skin reactions like hives, eczema, or itching
- Abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea

It's critical for people who have food allergies to identify them and to avoid foods that cause allergic reactions. Some foods can cause severe illness and, in some cases, a life-threatening allergic reaction called anaphylaxis, which can constrict airways in the lungs, severely lower blood pressure, and cause suffocation by the swelling of the tongue or throat. Research suggests that people with asthma are particularly at risk for anaphylactic reactions.

What is a food intolerance?

Although many people have adverse reactions to certain foods, true food allergy—a reaction triggered by the immune system—is uncommon. Unlike a food allergy, a food intolerance doesn't involve the immune system.

According to the Cleveland Clinic, a food intolerance is a digestive system response rather than an immune system response. It occurs when something in a food irritates a person's digestive system or when a person is unable to properly digest or break down the food—often owing to a lack of a specific enzyme. Intolerance to lactose, found in milk and other dairy products, is a very common food intolerance.

You're more likely to develop food allergies if several members of your family have allergies.

It's important to distinguish food intolerance from food allergy. If you have a food allergy, eating even the tiniest amount of the food may trigger a serious allergic reaction. By contrast, if you have a food intolerance, you can often eat small amounts of the food without a reaction.

How are food allergies managed?

At present, there is no cure for food allergies. The best way to manage a food allergy is to avoid the foods (or food proteins) that trigger the reaction. To do this, you must read the detailed ingredient lists on each food you consider eating. Many allergy-producing foods, such as peanuts, eggs, and milk, appear in foods one normally would not associate them with. Peanuts and milk, for example, may be used as a hidden protein source in a variety of foods, such as candy, caramel sauces, baked goods, and cereals—just to name a few. Eggs are used in some salad dressings, marshmallows, mayonnaise, and sauces. (See sidebar for more information.)

Because of a new law, the Food and Drug Administration now requires ingredients in a packaged food to appear on its label. You can avoid most of the foods to which you are sensitive if you read food labels carefully. In addition, avoid restaurant-prepared foods that might contain ingredients to which you are allergic.

Patients with severe allergies and a high possibility of anaphylaxis are often advised to carry a pre-loaded syringe containing epinephrine (adrenaline) for emergency treatment. Milder allergies can be treated with an antihistamine.

Can a chiropractor help treat my allergies?

Some doctors of chiropractic specialize in the treatment of allergies, such as those who are members of the ACA's Council on Diagnosis and Internal Disorders or Council on Nutrition. The doctor of chiropractic may ask the patient to maintain a food diary to record foods eaten each day and any resulting symptoms. Specific allergy tests may be recommended to help determine the exact allergen.

Source: American Academy of Allergy Asthma and Immunology

A Guide to Reading Food Labels

If you have food allergies, carefully read the labels for each food you consider eating to avoid the following ingredients:

Milk proteins
- Casein, caseinates, rennet casein, and whey
- Lactalbumin, lactalbumin phosphate, lactoglobulin, lactulose

Egg proteins
- Albumin (also spelled albumen)
- Meringue or meringue powder
- Artifical flavors, lecithin, macaroni, marzipan, marshmallows, nougat, and pasta may also include egg proteins.

Peanuts

Peanuts may be contained in:
- Artificial nuts, beer nuts, ground nuts, mixed nuts, monkey nuts, nut pieces
- Cold-pressed, expelled, or extruded peanut oil (sometimes listed as arachis oil)
- Mandelonas (peanuts that have been deflavored and reflavored to taste like almonds)
- Peanut butter or peanut flour
- African, Chinese, Indonesian, Mexican, Thai, and Vietnamese dishes; baked goods; candy; chili; egg rolls; enchilada sauce; flavoring; nougat; and sunflower seeds.

Dr. Joel Fugleberg is a chiropractor, fitness advocate, author, and health & wellness speaker in St. Paul, MN. His mission is to empower others to take a proactive approach in their health, through the use of chiropractic and other natural strategies, to achieve optimal function and wellness. With his background, he has helped thousands reach a higher level of health in his community.

If you would like to schedule a consultation, or to have Dr. Joel speak at your organization or event, he can be reached at the contact info listed below.

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