



TESTING FOR FOOD INTOLERANCES

feel better again

Food intolerances are common – as evidenced by the growing *free-from* food sections in supermarkets.

Some people manage to self-diagnose the cause of their symptoms. But there are also a number of less-researched methods commonly available. While it's fairly safe to try out different diets, in the long-term a balanced diet is vital. If in doubt, work with a nutritional therapist (see NTOI.ie) or dietician (INDI.ie). Both are well-versed in balancing even complicated diets.

Elimination-Rechallenge Diet

The most accepted method to find out how intolerant you are to a food is to try an Elimination-Rechallenge Diet. The Elimination phase lasts 10-12 weeks and involves studiously avoiding or rationing a particular ingredient. After this Elimination phase, the food is then re-introduced, carefully, to find if this triggers symptoms or feelings of unwellness. If symptoms are triggered, the food may need to be tightly rationed in future. However, some level of exposure (1-2 times/week) may still be possible.

Blood-testing

Testing for IgG antibodies against foods is quite recent. It is far simpler than traditional one-by-one food elimination. Instead, you gain an overview right from the start. Double-blind clinical studies have shown its usefulness in conditions as varied as Irritable Bowel Syndrome, Crohn's Disease or Migraines.

IgG antibodies are normally an important weapon in your body's defence arsenal – a form of smart bomb. The IgG molecules attach to 'foreign' threatening proteins (in bacteria or viruses) and mark them for attack by the immune system. When we are ill, it is mostly this attack, rather than the infection itself, that gives us the typical muggy head, skin irritation, nasal congestion, bowel discomfort or joint pain. However, the system can make mistakes. In a common type of food intolerance, the body mistakenly identifies harmless food proteins as enemies. We are not fully sure why this happens, but we know it is more common in wealthier countries. Increased weight & higher sugar intake may play a role. These same countries also suffer more allergy, hay fever and asthma as well as auto-immune (self-attacking) conditions like coeliac disease or underactive thyroid.

Another way to look at this is that the immune system becomes over-stimulated by our modern diets and develops 'road-rage', reacting against foods and tissues that have done little or nothing to deserve it.

Intolerance or Allergy?

With allergy, it's more a yes/no question. If you are allergic, even tiny amounts of the allergen may lead to serious effects, like potentially fatal peanut anaphylaxis. Allergy involves a different type of antibody known as IgE. With intolerances, it's more a question of 'how much?' People with intolerances may tolerate limited exposure to the offending food without much hardship. The Elimination-Rechallenge Diet will help teach you where your limits lie.

Testing

We take a finger-prick blood sample and test for IgG antibodies against 50 common foods. Since the main problem is with the immune system's 'road rage', the reactions are generally directed against everyday foods like dairy, wheat or gluten. And all forms of that food will be impacted whether raw, cooked, baked, fried or low-fat. You may also cross-react to related foods. For example, if you react only to the protein *casein* in cow's milk, you would likely tolerate goat's milk as it is low in casein. However, if your reaction is to other milk proteins, like *beta-lactoglobulin*, you probably won't manage goat's milk as it contains nearly as much as cow's milk. You will learn this type of information from your Elimination Re-challenge diet.



Foods tested

The test we use is manufactured by Cambridge Nutritional Sciences, a division of the Omega Diagnostics group in Scotland. It is approved by EU and Irish health authorities and is based on the ELISA method, the main antibody-testing technology used in most hospital laboratories. The test uses extracts from the raw food. If antibodies from your blood sample attach to foods in the test, it will be detected as a colour. The report you receive compares the levels of antibody detected. Some people show only borderline levels of antibodies, or none. Some show strong reactions to a single food, such as cow's milk or wheat. Some show a very hyper-activated immune system and signs of reaction to many foods. Symptoms can vary and it is not always the worst result that has the worst symptoms. The Elimination-Rechallenge Diet generally helps clarify this.



Foods tested include cow's milk, grains, meats, fish, vegetables, pulses, yeast, fruits.

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| Grains & Grasses: | Corn, Durum wheat (pasta), Gluten, Oats, Rice, Rye, Wheat, |
| Dairy: | Cow's milk |
| Meats & Seafood: | Beef, Chicken, Lamb, Pork, Freshwater fish mix, Shellfish, Tuna, White (sea) Fish mix |
| Pulses & Beans: | Cocoa Bean, Legume (beans mix), Peanut, Soya Bean |
| Fruits: | Apple, Blackcurrant, Grapefruit, Melon, Orange & Lemon, Strawberry, Tomato, |
| Yeasts & Fungi: | Mushroom, Yeast |
| Nuts: | Almond, Brazil, Cashew, Walnut |
| Vegetables: | Broccoli, Cabbage, Carrot, Celery, Cucumber, Garlic, Ginger, Leek, Olive, Peppers, Potato |
| Other: | Egg, Tea |

Preparing for the test

We normally ask you to fill out a form that helps us identify if the test is appropriate and whether there are other factors that might be involved in triggering your symptoms. It is also recommended to eat a *full* diet, including items that you react to, for a month before testing so that the test is a fair reflection of how you react. Exceptions would be in cases where you already know about one food reaction (e.g. perhaps you are coeliac), and don't need to have that particular reaction confirmed.

Cross-reactions

It is possible, even probable, that you react to foods that are closely related to those you show a reaction to in the test. If you have antibodies to the grains in the test (wheat, oats, corn, rye etc.), you will likely also react to grains not in the test, such as spelt. Anyone with reaction to cow's milk will also need to approach goat's milk cautiously (via the Re-challenge Diet).

There are also some weird and wonderful cross-reactions. According to US data, the average bar of chocolate contains 8 insect parts – the FDA limit of acceptability is as high as 60 insect fragments per 100g of chocolate or 150 per 100g of flour. Since insect shells use the same proteins as shellfish... it is possible to have (a few) antibodies that bind to shellfish even if the closest you normally get is chocolate or flour.

Contact us for an appointment

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