

[Avoiding Food Allergies](#)

Category : [January/February/March 2009](#)

Published by dharmalingam on May. 04, 2009

Ayurveda

Avoiding Food Allergies

A seldom recognized condition can be countered with a healthy diet and Ayurvedic remedies

by Dr. Virender Sodhi

A food allergy or sensitivity is an adverse reaction to the ingestion of a particular food. It may be caused by a protein, a starch or by a contaminant found in the food, such as today's ubiquitous colorings, preservatives, chemicals, pesticides and insecticides. It is estimated that 12 million Americans have food allergies, and the numbers are rising. Today, six to eight percent of children under the age of three have food allergies. Nearly four percent of adults live with them. In my own clinical experience, I have found the occurrence of food allergies and sensitivities to be even higher. It is a little-known fact that food allergy causes roughly 30,000 emergency room visits per year in the United States and, tragically, almost 200 deaths.

Although an individual could be allergic to any food, even fruits and vegetables, eight foods account for 90% of all food-allergic reactions: milk, eggs, peanuts, tree nuts (walnut, cashew, etc.,) fish, shellfish, soy and wheat. The most common food allergies in children are caused by milk, eggs, peanuts, tree nuts and wheat.

Food allergies are associated with a multitude of symptoms and can result in a seemingly endless list of illnesses: chronic diarrhea, duodenal ulcer, gastritis, irritable bowel syndrome, malabsorption, ulcerative colitis, nephrosis, chronic infections, anxiety, depression, hyperactivity, inability to concentrate, insomnia, irritability, mental confusion, seizures, bursitis, joint pain, low back pain, asthma, chronic bronchitis, wheezing, acne, eczema, hives, itching, skin rash, arrhythmia, edema, fainting, fatigue, headache, hypoglycemia, itchy nose or throat, migraines and sinusitis.

What causes food allergy? The condition is often inherited. When both parents have allergies, there is a 67% chance that the children will also have them. In cases when only one parent is allergic, the chance of a child being prone to allergies is still high, almost a third. Other factors include constant exposure to a certain food, improper digestion and poor integrity of the intestinal barrier. In fact, allergenic foods are often among those we crave the most.

We are exposed to environmental pollution and to food chain pollution, with genetically modified food, hazardous chemicals in our water and an increased intake of packaged food. These are new challenges to the body, and our immune system does not cope well with them, creating a background for allergies and sensitivities.

In its classic form, a food allergy occurs when an ingested food molecule acts as an antigen--a toxin or other foreign substance that induces an immune response, producing antibodies, our body's guardian cells. Antibodies are protein molecules, made by white blood cells. They bind themselves to foreign substances, in this case the food antigens. These food antigens may cause the release of histamines, which cause swelling, inflammation and an array of different signs and symptoms.

Lactase deficiency is a common cause of food intolerance, in which a person can experience bloating, abdominal pain and diarrhea when drinking milk. Intolerance to gluten (a component of wheat, rye, barley, kamut and spelt wheat) occurs as a disease called gluten-sensitive enteropathy. In a common phenomenon called cross-reactivity, a person with a history of reacting to a certain food, such as shrimp, may also develop an intolerance to related foods, in this example crab, lobster and crayfish.

The most common food allergy symptoms are sometimes due to other causes. Some foods contain histamine readily available and cause effects that mimic food intolerance. Histamine can reach high levels in cheese, some wines and certain fish. Common compounds most frequently tied to adverse reactions that can be confused with food allergy are yellow dye number 5, monosodium glutamate (MSG) and sulfides, which occur naturally in some foods but are added to others to enhance crispness or prevent the growth of mold. Some people have a food intolerance with a psychological origin.

To correctly diagnose a real food allergy, a doctor first must determine if the patient is having an adverse reaction to specific foods. The doctor makes this assessment with the help of a detailed history from the patient, the patient's dietary diary or an elimination diet. Diagnosis is confirmed by more objective skin tests, blood tests or food challenges.

An elimination diet is commonly prescribed to help mitigate food allergies. Commonly eaten foods are eliminated and replaced with hypoallergenic foods. A standard elimination diet consists of rice, mung beans, lentils, banana, apple and a cabbage-family vegetable. It is extremely important that no allergenic foods be consumed in this diet.

In such cases, I often prescribe herbs like pippli three times a day to help increase the secretions of gastrointestinal tract. Trifal is helpful, eliminating the toxic load and at the same time restoring the lining of the gut back to normal. I also advise curcumin 250 mg three times per day. Curcumin helps to stop the inflammation. In addition, it is good to have coconut milk, which contains mostly medium chain triglycerides. It is helpful as a food and boosts the colonic bacteria. Probiotics are added to help the gut to recover its gut flora back to normal.

The patient stays on the elimination diet for at least one week, and up to one month. After the elimination-diet period, individual foods are reintroduced every two days. Reintroduction of allergenic foods will typically produce a more severe or recognizable symptom than before, allowing us to identify the root causes.

We can keep ourselves free from food allergies. Create a relationship with your food. Eat real food, in its original form, which has been minimally processed or altered. If bugs avoid it, it probably is not good for you either. Eat slowly and chew your food properly. Do not exercise right after eating. Also, avoid drinking much water with food, as it dilutes your gastric juices. Water is better in-between meals. Eat food which is available in season which has been organically or naturally grown.

Remember, good food is a wonderful friend to our health.

