

Food Allergy/Intolerance

What is meant by the term Food Allergy/Intolerance?

This is a broad term that changes with each patient. Typically a true food allergy is a response that happens immediately after a person eats or is exposed to a certain food (the allergen). Symptoms may range from skin rashes, hives, itching up to throat swelling, drop in blood pressure and a trip to the emergency. This type of allergy is usually found by the patient who is unknowingly exposed to the problem food. The type of allergy we see here in the clinic operates through a different mechanism in the body. It is not necessarily immediate; delayed up to 6-8 hours.

What kind of symptoms do you see with delayed food triggers?

Symptoms include the following: runny nose or chronic sinus problems, constipation, irritable bowel, joint aches, "brain fog", headaches, and attention problems.

How do you test for delayed food triggers?

There are couple of different ways to find answers. One is to do a food elimination diet. This involves eliminating the most prominent trigger foods from the diet for 2 to 3 weeks and then slowly add them back one at a time. The patient is to pay attention to the food(s) which bring back the symptoms they are concerned about. This is effective but technically very difficult. It is nice because it is free and individualized, but is very difficult for those who work outside the home or who travel frequently.

A second method is to have a blood test drawn. This requires no special diet up front and is extremely convenient. It does have a charge, and requires payment up front. Insurance reimbursement is variable, but it is often covered.

What happens once I learn what the triggers are?

The first phase of treatment is avoidance. This means to avoid as best you can the problem food or foods for anywhere from 1 -3 months. For certain foods this can be difficult as some ingredients may be "hidden," but I encourage you to do the best you can. You will not truly know how much the trigger affects you until you eliminate it out of the diet. During this phase, we try to build people up nutritionally so that the gut can heal.

The second phase of the treatment is rechallenging the original food trigger. For example, if the food trigger was milk, I ask the patient to introduce milk every 3rd or 4th day. If symptoms return, then milk still is a problem and should be avoided. If symptoms don't return or return in a very mild fashion, milk can be continued. Any food trigger should probably not be eaten every day or the food trigger symptoms may return.