

FOOD ALLERGIES & SENSITIVITIES

The old saying goes: One man's medicine is another man's poison. Nowhere is this truer than when it comes to our different and unique responses to food. And nowhere in medicine is there more controversy, superstition, and religious fervor than there is surrounding the subject of food allergies and illness. This prevents doctors from helping millions of people suffering from allergic, inflammatory, immune, or toxic reactions to the ordinary food they consume every day.

When most people think of food allergies, they usually get an image of someone eating a peanut and ending up in the emergency room with a swollen tongue, hives, or the inability to breathe. That's what is called an **immediate allergy (also known as an IgE hypersensitivity reaction)** which turns on an aggressive histamine reaction. These are very serious but also quite rare. But there is a different type of food reaction that is much less dramatic and deadly. It is called a **delayed allergy (or IgG delayed hypersensitivity)**. This reaction is much more common and creates much more suffering for millions of people. It is mostly ignored by conventional medicine. Nonetheless, **IgG reactions play a HUGE role in many chronic illnesses and weight problems.**

Delayed allergic reactions **can cause symptoms anywhere from a few hours to a few days after ingestion.** They also cause a wide range of problems like weight gain and retention, acid reflux, fluid retention, fatigue, brain fog, irritable bowel syndrome, heart palpitations, mood problems, sleeping problems, headaches, sinus and nasal congestion, joint pains, acne, arthritis, eczema, and more. These are all sources of inflammation. Specific symptoms vary widely. The body becomes inflamed because the immune system recognizes protein in an otherwise healthy food as a foreign invader.

Both IgE allergies and IgG sensitivities are on the rise in our culture for many reasons. Many times we develop sensitivities to foods we eat all the time, and the over-consumption puts our body in warning mode. Most often, I find the delayed reactions occur because many of our twenty-first century habits lead to a breakdown of the normal barrier that protects our immune system from the outside world of foods, bugs, and toxins. That barrier is our gut. Over 60% of our immune system lies just underneath that barrier. When the lining of your gut breaks down, food particles get underneath the barrier and trigger our immune system to recognize food (that particular food!) as a foreign invader. (For this reason, many people develop IgG sensitivities to the very foods they eat most often.) This immune response sets off a chain reaction leading to inflammation throughout your body.

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Your gut barrier can be weakened by a nutrient-poor diet high in sugar and white flour and low in fiber, by nutritional deficiencies of zinc and omega-3 fats, by overuse of antibiotics, medications, and/or hormones, by exposure to environmental toxins, and by high levels of mental and emotional stress. Then the outside environment “leaks” into your body and you develop allergies and systemic immune problems. This is called a **leaky gut**. While everyone is different, there are some foods that irritate the immune system more commonly than others. These are **gluten** (a protein in grains including wheat, barley, rye, spelt, triticale, and kamut), dairy (e.g. milk, cheese, butter, yogurt), **corn, eggs, soy, nuts, citrus fruits, nightshade vegetables** (e.g. tomatoes, bell peppers, potatoes, eggplant), and **yeast** (e.g. baker’s yeast, brewer’s yeast, wine, vinegar, fermented products).

While there are blood tests to help you identify IgG sensitivities, the gold-standard test (and the only way you will know for sure what foods are a problem for you) is to eliminate them fully (100%) from your diet for a short time (~4 weeks). To be effective, eliminations must be cold-turkey. Then reintroduce the food in quantity (two regular servings per day for three days in a row) and see what happens. If your immune system doesn't like the food, you are going to notice! Pay careful attention to your entire body and feelings and thoughts.

What changes? What can you learn about your unique sensitivities? Common symptoms of a food sensitivity reaction include headache, lethargy, stomach upset, achy joints, muscle pain, trouble sleeping, depression/anxiety, and skin breakout. But each of our bodies is unique!

Excerpted from The UltraSimple Diet by Mark Hyman M.D., Simon & Schuster, 2007 and The UltraMind Solution by Dr. Mark Hyman M.D., Simon & Schuster, 2009. Dr. Hyman is a pioneer, leader, and wildly successful functional medicine physician.