

The Most Common Food Allergens You Should Be Aware Of



Julie O'Connell Seamer

Food sensitivity exists when there is a recurring adverse reaction to a certain food consumed. Food intolerance and food allergies differ in that the former is a reaction that doesn't involve an immune response and the latter (allergy) refers to immune-based reactions to foods.

There are certainly some common foods that tend to aggravate. They include:

Sugar

Both lactose and fructose are types of sugar that cause digestive upset. Lactose (milk sugar) intolerance is higher in those with Asian, Middle Eastern, African, Maori and Indigenous Australian backgrounds.

Fructose intolerance exist when the body is unable to absorb fructose and fructans (fruit sugar). Avoidance of fruit and fruit products, coconut, honey, corn syrup an fortified wines is necessary. Reducing fructans in the diet is also helpful. Fructans are in all wheat containing foods and certain vegetables.

Gluten

Gluten is a protein inside wheat, rye and barley. People of Irish, Scottish, Indian and Middle Eastern backgrounds may be more susceptible to gluten intolerance. Severe cases of gluten intolerance exist in coeliac disease. The best treatment for sensitivity, intolerance and coeliacs is to adopt a gluten free diet. Fortunately many gluten-free foods, bakeries and products are now available and there is a much greater awareness of the health benefits of reducing gluten in our diets when it is proving problematic.

MSG

Most people don't realise that MSG occurs naturally in small amounts, in certain foods including cheese, tomatoes, soy sauce and mushrooms, and it is used as a flavour enhancer in Chinese cooking and food processing. Reactions to MSG can vary from mild nausea to headache, tightness in the chest and face, dry mouth, palpitations or asthma attack. Because vitamin B6 helps the metabolism of MSG a vitamin B supplement may help lessen the impact of a severe MSG reaction.

Amines

Biogenic amines are derived from the proteins in foods and occur naturally or develop during processing. Examples are histamine, tyramine, serotonin, dopamine, tryptamine, octopamine and phenylalanine. Sources include pickled foods, canned fish, sausages, cheese, meat extracts, red wine, chocolate, bananas, tomatoes, avocados etc. Reactions to histamine including flushing, intestinal spasm, low blood pressure. Certain amines such as tyramine constrict blood vessels and can trigger a sudden release of histamine thorough the body, causing headaches and migraine.

What are the most common food allergens you should be aware of?

Xanthines

These chemicals stimulate the central nervous system (CNS) and include caffeine which is found in tea, coffee, cocoa, chocolate and caffeinated drinks. Those sensitive to caffeine may experience heart palpitations, sweating, shaking, anxiety, insomnia, heartburn, nausea, colic and diarrhoea. Another example is theophylline which can be a potent diuretic contributing to urinary urgency.

Salicylates

Similar in chemical make up to aspirin, salicylate containing foods include herbs, spices, nuts, fruit, fruit juice and certain vegetables (olives, zucchini, capsicum, chilli). These chemical compounds can cause hives and are suspected to contribute to learning and behavioural problems in sensitive children, resulting in ADD and ADHD.

Sulphites

These preservatives (220-228) are used commonly in dried fruit, fruit juice, pickled foods, beer, wine and cider. Reactions include tightness in the chest, asthma and coughing. Sulphites can upset the digestive system creating unhealthy bacteria which contribute to wind, bloating, IBS and diarrhoea.

If you feel you may have some food sensitivities or intolerances it is always best to test and quantify these, rather than using guess work. I have a great range of options for you, including food charts and diet sheets to suit your needs.