

Food Intolerances

Demystifying the food intolerance and food allergy

By Kirsty Baxter



Food sustains life. While we need food to live, it often plays a central role in celebrations such as birthdays, births, engagements, weddings and many more festive occasions. As Zim Foodie celebrates food on many levels, showcasing many talented food-related businesses, people, chefs, and artisans in our beautiful country, I thought it poignant to highlight a side of food that is sadly less pleasant but commonly experienced. A food-intolerance, describes a range of food-related symptoms that are not immunologically-mediated, it is a condition associated with a wide range of symptoms caused by chronic inflammatory processes. Food-specific antibodies produced by the body's immune system and symptoms of food intolerance are closely linked. While the causes of food intolerance are not fully understood, inadequate digestion, candidiasis, parasites, infections, alcohol consumption or the effects of drugs and medications may play a role. Food intolerances are due to enzymatic defects in the digestive system or may be from pharmacological substances such as antibiotics and non-steroidal anti-inflammatories (aka 'pain killers'), which erode the mucosal lining of the gut.

Food Intolerances versus Food Allergies

Often used interchangeably, the terms food allergy, food intolerance, food sensitivity and hypersensitivity essentially all mean an abnormal reaction to certain foods that may manifest in a number of ways. Food intolerances occur when a person has difficulty digesting a particular food, that may lead to

chronic inflammation and gut permeability. Food allergies, an IgE mediated allergy, or Type I hypersensitivity reaction, are 'true' or 'classical' allergies. These types of food allergies produce an immediate adverse reaction (i.e. within seconds or minutes after ingestion with certain foods). Examples are peanuts and shellfish that cause symptoms such as rashes, sneezing, difficulty breathing and, for some people, can even be life threatening because of an anaphylactic shock. It is usually obvious which foods are responsible for a food allergy, which must be avoided for life.

A food intolerance, known as IgG mediated reaction (Type III allergy), is a delayed onset, also known as hypersensitivity or food sensitivity. Onset of symptoms are within hours or days after ingestion of the food. With a food intolerance, it is possible to eliminate the food from the diet for a period of time and then to re-introduce them gradually back into the diet after an improvement in symptoms. A food intolerance is a functional or structural intolerance to food, which is non-immunologic and non-toxic in origin, but is chemically based instead. A third type of food intolerance involves the effects of pharmacologically active amines and other compounds present in foods. Between stress, pollutants, chemicals in our food and water and other environmental stressors, modern society deals with a lot of inflammation and makes individuals susceptible to food intolerances.

Furthermore, it is of high importance to distinguish between a wheat allergy, a wheat intolerance and coeliac disease as

these are three different conditions. A wheat allergy occurs when a person's immune system reacts abnormally to wheat proteins, which can be life-threatening.

Symptoms of food intolerances when the immune system is overwhelmed or overworked, protein-food complexes can accumulate to produce symptoms of food intolerance, for example:

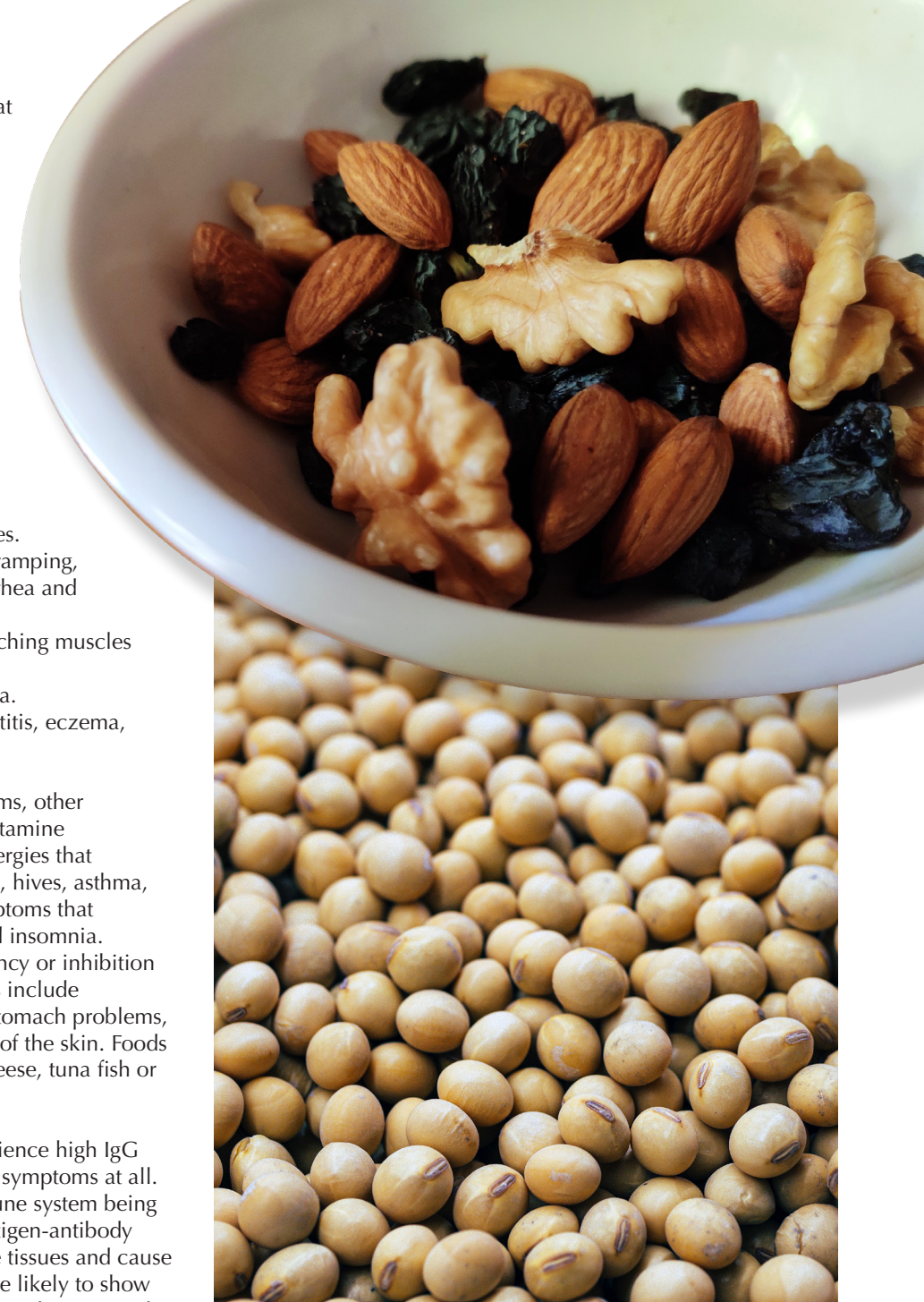
- Central Nervous System – migraine, headache, impaired concentration, mood changes, depression, anxiety, fatigue and hyperactivity.
- Skin – eczema, itchy skin and other rashes.
- Gastrointestinal – abdominal bloating, cramping, water retention, nausea, constipation, diarrhea and weight control problems.
- Musculoskeletal – arthritis, joint pains, aching muscles and weakness.
- Respiratory – rhinitis, sinusitis and asthma.
- Dermatological – urticaria, atopic dermatitis, eczema, itchy skin and other rashes.

Beyond the typical gastrointestinal symptoms, other physiological reactions can pertain to a histamine intolerance, where symptoms resemble allergies that include: a runny nose, itchy eyes, sneezing, hives, asthma, and a chronic cough, as well as other symptoms that include: headaches, joint pain, anxiety and insomnia. Histamine intolerance is due to the deficiency or inhibition of the enzyme diamine oxidase. Symptoms include migraines, headaches, dizziness, bowel / stomach problems, rhinitis, depression, irritation or reddening of the skin. Foods containing histamine include red wine, cheese, tuna fish or chocolate and citrus fruits, amongst others.

It is also possible for some people to experience high IgG levels to certain foods but do not have any symptoms at all. The reason is most likely due to their immune system being extremely efficient at clearing away the antigen-antibody complexes before they are deposited in the tissues and cause a problem. Certain common foods are more likely to show a positive result, for example: wheat, dairy, and soya. Foods consumed on a regular basis may increase the likelihood that the body may react to them. While an elimination diet is the gold standard, the benefit of doing a food intolerance test is that it will be able to show which foods that are eaten on a regular basis are a potential problem. In addition, an IgG test may highlight more unusual foods which a person may not have considered removing from their diet.

Why test for IgG antibodies to foods?

The efficacy of a diet based on the measurement of IgG antibodies specific for food components have been demonstrated in a number of conditions, both in independent studies and clinical practice. The results have benefited people with gastrointestinal issues, migraine, IBS, IBD and obesity. From a clinical perspective I used the functional IgG test in my nutritional therapy practice for a number of years which resulted in success for my clients.



Kirsty Baxter is a UK Registered Nutritional Therapy Practitioner, who has been in practice for nearly seven years, with a Master of Science in Nutrition (LSBU). Kirsty is a published researcher and an Institute of Functional Medicine member. Kirsty is an expert Reviewer for the Nutrition Evidence database in the UK and writes for a number of health and lifestyle magazines, and websites. She enjoys working collaboratively with a wide range of GPs and doctors to support awareness around the value of nutritional interventions alongside convention medicine and believes that we should start early to educate our children about a healthy diet.

