



# Is what you're eating affecting your health?

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The word allergy means 'altered reaction' and dates back to the early Greek civilisation. Allergies are caused by allergens, found in food, chemicals and inhalants. The reactions they cause can include headaches, migraines, vomiting, asthma and rashes. These are called IgE allergies and they affect the body quickly and in some serious cases, for example peanut and shellfish allergies, can cause anaphylactic shock. Other less serious allergies include hayfever, (usually caused by an inhalant like house dust mites or pollen) and conditions such as eczema. Although these allergies may be severe, they are more easily treated as they are quite obvious and quick to diagnose. A sufferer can avoid the allergen and antihistamines can be used to combat its effects. More serious cases like peanut allergy can be avoided with the back up of an adrenaline pen.

Food intolerance, which is an ever increasing problem, is far more complicated. It is estimated that nearly 45% of the population of Europe and the US suffer from some sort of food intolerance. This can come about after the gut has been affected by long term treatment of antibiotics or a period of stress that depletes the immune system. The intolerant person will feel ill anywhere between a couple of hours to a couple of days after ingesting or being exposed to the allergen, making it very difficult to diagnose.

Food intolerances can affect the following systems in the body with the following symptoms:

**Gastrointestinal** (IBS, bloating, abdominal pains, diarrhoea)

**Neurological** (migraine, headaches, dizziness, chronic fatigue)

**Dermatological** (eczema, psoriasis and acne)

**Musculoskeletal** (arthritis, aches and pains and swollen joints)

**Respiratory** (asthmas, rhinitis, sinusitis, wheezing, catarrh)

**Psychological** (anxiety, ADHD, panic attacks, depression, feeling "spacey")

Common problem foods include wheat, oats, barley, rye, corn, mushrooms, yeast, nuts, cows milk, eggs, chocolate and cocoa, cola, tea, coffee, potato, alcohol, saccharin, artificial sweeteners, msg and colourings and preservatives. You may be surprised by this list, as the foods seem harmless but as the saying goes, 'one man's meat is another man's poison.'

How do we deal with food intolerances? It's difficult to self-diagnose, so probably the best solution is to have blood taken for specific IgE antibodies. The newest tests are nearly 100% accurate and can save a lot of time and needless elimination diets. Alternatively, if you do suspect an intolerance, start keeping a food diary and note the time, food eaten and any symptoms that may arise. Keep the diary for a couple of months and you should see some patterns emerging. Once you have found the offending foods, cut them out of your diet for three months and see how you feel. These foods can then be gradually introduced back into the diet and eaten every so often with little effect.

If your diet is high in organic foods and you avoid additives, the likelihood of allergy or intolerance will be greatly reduced. If you continue to experience problems, seek professional help from your GP or a nutritionist.

*Kate was trained as a Nutritional Therapist at London's renowned Institute of Optimum Nutrition under Patrick Holford and is a member of the British Association of Nutritional Therapists and a member of the Guild of Health Writers. She has featured in several national publications including The Daily Mail and Glamour magazine.*