

Are Foods Causing Your Symptoms?

by Emily Penney, ND

Adverse food reactions are very common. If you have health concerns you suspect might be related to the foods you are eating, this article will help guide you on where to go next.

What are adverse food reactions?

Adverse food reactions can be broadly classified into 2 categories. The first category consists of IgE immune-mediated adverse reactions to foods that are termed *food allergies*. The second category is composed of adverse reactions that are not IgE mediated. These are known as *food sensitivities* or *intolerances*.

There is some confusion over these definitions. Many people (including doctors!) use the term *allergies* to refer to what are technically sensitivities or *intolerances*. “**Table A**” shows examples of the different terms used. For the purposes of this article we will conform to the technical terms **allergy** (IgE mediated) and **intolerance** (non-IgE mediated) respectively.

Table A:

	Other terms often used to describe adverse food reactions
IgE mediated reaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allergy • Immediate reaction • Sensitivity
non-IgE mediated reaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intolerance • Hypersensitivity • Sensitivity • Delayed reaction • IgG antibody mediated reaction • “allergy” is often (incorrectly) used to describe this type of reaction

How common are food allergies and intolerances?

There is some debate over just how common adverse food reactions actually are. Studies suggest the prevalence of food allergies to be between 3% - 10%.ⁱ In a study looking at prevalence rates of food allergy and intolerance combined, 27% of women and 14% of men reported symptoms related to food reactions.ⁱⁱ There are few good studies determining rates of intolerance alone. A well designed study using the Elimination/Challenge Diet as the testing criteria (the “gold standard” method of testing food intolerances) would likely show a higher prevalence.

What are the symptoms of food allergies?

Symptoms from true food allergies are typically more immediate than their non-IgE immune mediated counterparts. Common symptoms include:

- Rash or hives
- Nausea
- Stomach pain
- Diarrhea
- Itchy skin
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain
- Swelling of the airways to the lungs
- Anaphylaxis

What are the symptoms of food intolerances?

Food intolerance symptoms are typically delayed 20 minutes up to 48 hours after ingesting the offending food. Signs and symptoms of food intolerance include:

- Fatigue
- Nausea
- Sinus congestion
- Snoring
- Frequent colds
- Stomach pain
- Gas, cramps, or bloating
- Heartburn
- Diarrhea
- Headaches
- Irritability, nervousness
- Difficulty concentrating
- Hyperactivity, especially in children
- Joint pain and/or muscle aches

What medical conditions are associated with allergies and food intolerances?

Illnesses that commonly have adverse food reactions as a contributing factor include:

- Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)
- Asthma
- Fibromyalgia
- Eczema
- Attention Deficit/ Hyperactivity Disorder
- Hives
- High blood pressure
- Heartburn (Gastro-Esophageal Reflux Disease)
- Autoimmune conditions (Rheumatoid Arthritis, Sjogren's, Crohn's, Hashimoto's, etc)
- Frequent colds & flus
- Ear infections
- And many others...

How are food allergies diagnosed?

Skin testing for allergies is used to identify the substances that are causing the allergy symptoms. It is performed by either applying an extract of an allergen to the skin, scratching, or pricking the skin to allow exposure, and then evaluating the skin's reaction. It may also be done by injecting the allergen under the skin, or by applying it to a patch that is worn on the skin for a specified period of time.

Blood tests (IgE antibodies) for allergies are sometimes performed to find out what triggers an allergic reaction and are often used if a patient has a skin condition or is taking medications, such as antihistamines. Such drugs can interfere with an allergy skin test, which is a common test used to identify allergy triggers, but in general do not interfere with allergy blood tests. IgE blood tests for food allergies are not as accurate as skin testing.

How are food intolerances diagnosed?

There are three main methods that Boise Natural Health physicians utilize for diagnosing food intolerances. Each has its' benefits and limitations. Two or more methods can be combined as a means of overcoming the limitations of each.

Table B:

Testing Methods	Benefits	Limitations
<p>Elimination/Challenge Diet</p> <p>All potentially reactive foods are removed from the diet for one to three weeks and then systematically reintroduced to determine which foods are problematic</p>	<p>Highly accurate if done correctly (considered to be the "gold standard")</p> <p>No testing fee</p>	<p>Hard to do correctly (requires self discipline and attention to detail)</p> <p>Only picks up common foods</p> <p>Can take several weeks to complete</p> <p>Very limited diet</p> <p>Most effectively done under the supervision of a physician to avoid mistakes and nutrient deficiencies</p> <p>Not appropriate for testing true allergies (IgE mediated)</p>
<p>Blood test (IgG)</p> <p>ELISA antibody test for IgG reactions to 96 different foods</p>	<p>Easier than the elimination diet</p> <p>Tests 96 different foods (more if desired)</p> <p>Gives a print out of what was tested and the degree of reaction to each food</p>	<p>Only picks up IgG mediated reactions, will miss intolerances caused by other factors.</p> <p>Results need confirmation with a modified elimination diet</p> <p>Takes two weeks for test results to come in</p> <p>Fee involved. Blood draw required.</p>
<p>Neuromuscular Sensitivity Testing (NST) The testing component of NAET. Utilizes kinesiology to determine the body's neuromuscular response to different substances.</p>	<p>Highly accurate when performed by a trained practitioner</p> <p>Easy and Non-invasive</p> <p>Done in office</p> <p>Can also be used to diagnose allergies (food and airborne)</p>	<p>Only a few foods can be tested at one time, therefore requires multiple visits</p> <p>Fee involved</p>

How are food allergies and intolerances treated?

Food allergies and intolerances can be treated with avoidance of the offending foods. For those patients who prefer not to do long term avoidance, NAET is a welcome alternative.

Nambudripad's Allergy Elimination Technique, or NAET, is an all natural, drug-free treatment for eliminating allergies and food intolerances, and resolving allergy-related conditions, often with lasting results. It is painless, and non-invasive.

NAET utilizes neuromuscular sensitivity testing for diagnosing food allergies and intolerances. NAET therapy works by reprogramming the brain and nervous system to stop reacting to the offending foods.

Conclusion

Adverse food reactions can be confusing and frustrating to deal with, especially when there are multiple foods you are reacting to. To date, conventional doctors tend to acknowledge food allergies, and misdiagnose or discount food intolerances. With their strong conventional and alternative medicine training, naturopathic physicians are in a unique position to help you sort through this important issue. Each staff person at Boise Natural Health has struggled in the past with their own adverse food reactions, and come out ahead! We all enjoy better health as a result, and enjoy helping our patients find the same freedom.

How do I learn more?

- To set up a **free 10 minute consult** with a BNH physician to help determine if food allergy or intolerance testing is right for you, please call our office at 208-338-0405.
- To learn more about **Elimination/Challenge Diets** go to: <http://www.diet.com/g/elimination-diets>
- To learn more about **IgG food intolerance testing** go to: <http://www.usbiotek.com/Services-IgG%20antibody-Assessment-Panels.php>
- To learn more about **NAET** go to: <http://www.boisenaturalhealth.com/services/naet>
- To read **patient testimonials** about NAET and Boise Natural Health go to: <http://www.boisenaturalhealth.com/testimonials>

ⁱ J Allergy Clin Immunol. 2011 Jan 12, Epidemiology of food allergy. Sicherer SH.

ⁱⁱ Allergy. 2001 Dec;56(12):1172-9., Epidemiology of food allergy/food intolerance in adults: associations with other manifestations of atopy., Schäfer T, Böhler E, Ruhdorfer S, Weigl L, Wessner D, Heinrich J, Filipiak B, Wichmann HE, Ring J.