

## Identifying Food Sensitivities

“Food allergy can do anything to any part of the body.” Dr. James Breneman wrote that in the first edition of *Basics of Food Allergy*. Although this does not mean that food allergies are the cause of all symptoms and illness, a food allergy should always be considered as a possible cause of nearly any symptom—even ones you wouldn’t normally associate with food allergies. After all, according to Dr. Breneman, food sensitivities are involved in 60 percent of all illnesses.

It is estimated that that up to 12 million Americans have food allergies or sensitivities. A food allergy is an abnormal response by the immune system to a food trigger. Development of food allergies is dependent on a number of factors including timing of exposure to the allergenic food, frequency of consuming the allergenic food, and the integrity of the gastrointestinal system. Food allergies are implicated in a wide variety of conditions, some of which include migraine, depression, inflammatory bowel disease, chronic ear infections, eczema, psoriasis, recurrent infections, and weight gain.

### When to Suspect a Food Sensitivity

Any time you have an undiagnosed, persistent symptom or group of symptoms, you should consider a food sensitivity as a possible cause. The “index of suspicion” should always be higher if you have a history of childhood allergies, including colic as an infant, recurrent childhood sore throat, recurrent ear infection, eczema, asthma, or “catching everything going around.”

A history of hay fever or chronic sinus should also prompt thoughts of hidden food sensitivity, as should any family history of allergies. And a history of strep throat always means milk and dairy allergy, even decades later.

But now, back to suspecting food allergies in general. Children will sometimes have physical signs of a food sensitivity, including the following:

- Allergic shiners (dark circles under the eyes not associated with crying or lack of sleep)
- Dennie’s lines (multiple horizontal creases in the lower eyelids)
- Intermittent sudden redness in the ears
- Occasionally a horizontal crease across the lower nose

Adults have these physical signs much more rarely, but sometimes food sensitivity in adults is signaled by a fluctuation in daily weight of two to three pounds or more (a fluctuation that’s not related to the menstrual period).

### Testing for Food Sensitivities

There are many ways to identify food sensitivities. Physicians and other health care practitioners (as well as individuals suffering from symptoms) have found that elimination diets, certain types of skin tests, and blood tests can all be helpful in the identification of food sensitivities.

Not all techniques work for everyone, and food sensitivity testing and evaluation can be just as individual as the food sensitivities themselves.

1. Elimination diets are one of the oldest techniques, and among the least expensive. A well-planned elimination diet can be difficult to follow, since the most commonly offending foods

usually include foods most commonly consumed. However, it's hard to argue with the results if eliminating a food (or foods) results in symptom disappearance, and re-introduction of the food(s) brings the symptom back.

Unfortunately, it's unusual to have just one or two food sensitivities, and symptoms often won't go away until a large majority (or in a few cases, all) of the offending foods are eliminated.

It's best to work with an experienced, nutritionally oriented practitioner who can help devise a suitable elimination diet, both to successfully avoid offending foods and to help you avoid nutritional deficiencies while following the elimination diet.

2. Skin tests vary greatly in quality. Although scratch tests are still commonly performed, they tend to be unreliable—and nearly all natural medicine practitioners (and many conventional practitioners!) agree.

3. Blood tests include determinations of circulating antibodies to specific foods (ELISA), or tests of white cell reactivity to foods (ALCAT), or both (ELISA-ACT). The tests are among the simplest to perform, requiring only a single blood specimen.

### **Blood Test: Food Allergy Testing For IgG Delayed Onset Food Allergies**

IgG antibodies are produced for several hours or days after exposure to an allergen and are called Type III delayed hypersensitivity reactions. Immune complexes activate a portion of the immune system known as complement and cytokines. This process takes anywhere from several hours to several days, which is why hypersensitivity reactions are delayed. Depending on which tissues are involved, deposition of IgG-Antigen complexes may result in a variety of health concerns such as joint pain, chronic headaches, hypertension, fatigue, eczema, and psoriasis. Serum is added to a 96-well plate containing different food antigens and then evaluated for classic antigen/antibody interactions. The test provides a report of whether the levels of antibody to the various foods suggest that each one is "safe" to eat, best to eat in moderation, or to avoid entirely.

Allergy testing provides a quick and easy way for practitioners to discover potential causes of allergic reactions and allergy related disease. The test reports include reference ranges along with a suggested rotation diet. When compliance is high, patients report improvement in symptoms, elimination of long-standing health issues, and a more satisfying quality of life. At Boulder Natural Medicine Clinic, we offer serum lab testing for food allergies. Please give us a call if you would like more information.