



5 Myths About Food Allergies

Carolee Bateson-Koch, ND

Get the facts, not the fiction, about food allergies and intolerances!

Have you ever eaten anything that just didn't agree with you? Did it make your head ache or your stomach lurch in protest? According to a report by the BBC News, food allergies and intolerances are so common that one in three people say they've had similar unpleasant reactions to foods.

Yet studies show that only one to three per cent of the population actually has a clinical allergy, says the National Institute of Allergies and Infectious Diseases in the United States. Even the BBC News later contradicted itself by reporting that food allergies are a "false epidemic" and debunking them as "trendy." Such conflicting information can leave a person wondering what the real truth is about allergies.

Myth #1

Food allergy and food intolerance are the same thing

The results of another BBC News survey reveal that less than half of people knew the difference between a food allergy and an intolerance. Even though they may cause the same symptoms, there is a major difference between the two. Food allergy is an immune system response and tends to produce acute symptoms; food intolerance is caused by the lack of enzymes needed to digest food, which often leads to chronic illness.

Food allergy occurs when the immune system reacts to a food by creating IgE antibodies. When the same food is again eaten, these antibodies signal the immune system to release massive amounts of chemicals, including histamine, which trigger a cascade of allergic symptoms including asthma, skin rashes, mood swings, headaches and heart palpitations. These acute symptoms generally occur within minutes after ingestion of the food.

Symptoms of food intolerance can occur hours to days after ingesting the food and are termed "delayed reactions." Food intolerance is linked to ineffective

Eight Worst Offenders

While it is known that an individual can be allergic or intolerant to any food, the following eight foods account for 90 per cent of all food-allergic reactions:

- milk
- eggs
- peanuts
- tree nuts such as walnut or cashew
- fish
- shellfish
- soy
- wheat.

digestion and lack of enzymes. For example, a person with lactose (milk sugar) intolerance lacks an enzyme (lactase) that is needed to digest the milk sugar. When the person eats milk products, symptoms occur such as gas, bloating, abdominal cramps and pain. Since these symptoms often occur hours to days later, they can be difficult to link to the particular food.

Myth #2

There is no cure for food allergies

Most medical authorities believe that there is no cure for food allergies because, according to the Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Network, there are currently no medications that cure food allergies.

The fact is, there is certainly much that can be done. A diet that is free of offending foods, together with natural nutritional supplements, enzymes, herbal formulas and homeopathic remedies, can be very beneficial to people with both food allergies and intolerances. Normalizing the digestive function and healing a damaged intestinal lining will go a long way to eliminate adverse food reactions.

Myth #3

Reading labels will protect against adverse food reactions

While reading food labels is recommended for people with allergies, it is not a guarantee that reactions will not take place. The *Journal of Allergy and Immunology* reported a study of 129 families with known food reactions. The study found that 50 per cent of the reactions to foods were "hidden" in sauces and dressings, 43 per cent of the reactions occurred from desserts, 13 per cent from appetizers and nine per cent from miscellaneous foods.

The US Food and Drug Administration, in conjunction with Wisconsin and Minnesota state regulators, recently conducted a study that focused on peanuts and eggs in 85 randomly selected bakery, candy and ice cream manufacturers. It was revealed that 25 per cent of the products sampled contained undeclared peanuts and 10 per cent contained undeclared eggs. Only half of the manufacturers verified that the product label included all the ingredients. Less than half of the establishments had procedures in place for avoiding or minimizing cross contamination from improper clean-up or use of the same utensils and baking sheets from one batch to another.

Myth #4

Once you are allergic to a substance, you are always allergic to that substance

A survey of 1,000 people conducted in England found that 43 per cent incorrectly believed that allergies are with a person for life. However, allergies often change; one

Studies show that 50 per cent of the reactions to foods were "hidden" in sauces and dressings, 43 per cent of the reactions occurred from desserts, 13 per cent from appetizers and nine per cent from miscellaneous foods.

How Do Enzymes Help?

Nutritional plant enzyme therapy has emerged as a major healing force for many chronic conditions, including food allergy. In fact, one study found that with the administration of enzymes, bronchial asthma was 88 per cent improved, asthma induced by food was 92 per cent improved and eczema from food was 83 per cent improved.

One function of supplemental plant enzymes is to help ensure the proper digestion of food. Interestingly, an early sign of enzyme deficiency is often disturbed digestion. When food is not properly digested, the food particles cannot be efficiently absorbed to be used as nutrients. Instead, the body recognizes these abnormal food particles as foreign invaders, which activates the immune system and can result in allergic reactions and inflammation. Nutritional enzyme therapy is especially effective at fighting allergies because the enzymes break down the protein allergens, thereby decreasing allergic reactions and the release of inflammatory products such as histamine from the cells.

Nutritional plant enzyme supplementation can serve as replacement for the body's own pancreatic enzymes, which are often in short supply when a person suffers from food allergy and intolerance. Consequently, this leaves the pancreatic enzymes free to perform other functions in the body such as boosting immunity. Supplemental plant enzymes also help promote the growth of healthy intestinal flora, which bolsters immune function, improves digestion and helps decrease allergic reactions to food.



allergy may disappear and another may spring up. When children experience allergy problems, doctors often reassure parents that the child may “outgrow their allergies.”

Allergies change when conditions within the body change. Conventional medical treatment for allergies normally consists of antihistamines, steroids and desensitization shots. These may work reasonably well in treating the symptoms of the disorder, but they do nothing to correct the underlying cause of the problem. The holistic approach is first to heal and normalize digestive function with dietary changes, nutritional enzyme supplements and herbal formulas. The reduction or disappearance of food allergy symptoms follows the beneficial changes within the body.

Myth #5

Food allergy is not a serious condition

Some allergic reactions to food can be very serious and even fatal. In the US, food-induced anaphylaxis may cause up to 30,000 emergency room visits per year that result in 150 to 200 deaths. An anaphylactic reaction to food is a sudden, severe, sometimes fatal systemic allergic reaction that can involve many areas of the body including the gastrointestinal tract, the respiratory tract and the cardiovascular system. Symptoms usually occur within minutes of consuming the offending food. The incidence of anaphylactic reactions is about 30 per 100,000 people, and people with asthma, eczema and hay fever are at greater risk. It can take only a trace amount of a reactive food to set off a potentially life-threatening reaction in many individuals.

While the exact number of people suffering from food allergy is not known, scientists estimate that between six and seven million Americans suffer from true food allergies. Because almost all food eaten contains a combination of ingredients, additives and chemicals, most people have little way of determining if they are reacting to the food or to an ingredient or additive to the food. ■

References available upon request.

*Carolee Bateson-Koch is a naturopathic physician and the author of **Allergies: Disease in Disguise**, published by **alive Books**. She lives in Whitehorse, Yukon.*

What You Can Do

Daily supplements:

- vitamin C, 1,000 milligrams three times daily
- quercetin, 500 mg three times daily
- vitamin B complex, 100 mg
- acidophilus, three capsules or one tablespoon (15 ml)
- bromelain digestive enzymes, 1000 mg three times daily

Herbal remedies:

- dandelion
- burdock
- stinging nettle
- Take as tincture twice a day or three cups (750 ml) of herbal tea daily for three weeks.

Nutrition:

- Avoid foods that cause a reaction.
- Avoid all foods with artificial colour and preservatives.
- Try kamut or spelt instead of wheat.
- Eat pineapple and papaya for a natural supply of digestive enzymes.
- See a naturopath about a supervised three-day fast.

*Sources: **alive Encyclopedia of Natural Healing; Prescription for Nutritional Healing**, by James and Phyllis Balch.*

