

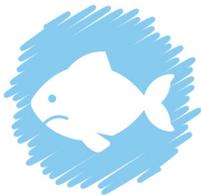


Up to 15 million Americans have food allergies; a number that has grown and continues to grow. The reasons for the increase are not clear, but knowing for sure if you have a food allergy is the first step in managing it.



What are food allergies?

Food allergies are an abnormal response by the immune system to the protein portion of a food. While it is possible to be allergic to almost any food, 8 foods account for 90% of all allergies - milk, egg, wheat, soy, peanuts, tree nuts, fish and shellfish. Symptoms of a food allergic reaction can range from mild, including hives, itchiness, nausea and vomiting, to severe including trouble swallowing, difficulty breathing and chest pain, which may signal potentially deadly anaphylaxis.



What are food intolerances?

Food intolerances involve a reaction to food that does not involve the immune system. Symptoms can be very problematic, but are almost never as severe as food allergies. Lactose intolerance, for example, happens when someone is missing the enzyme needed to digest lactose, the sugar in milk products. Some people have an intolerance to additives such as MSG and sulfites, while others may be intolerant to gluten.



What to do if you think you have an allergy:

Food allergic symptoms usually happen within a few minutes to a few hours after eating the problem food. If you have any of the symptoms associated with food allergies, especially the severe ones, it is important to get medical attention right away. If you have been having mild symptoms that you think may be related to a food allergy or intolerance, it is important to seek the advice of a health care professional who specializes in food allergies. The symptoms of allergies and intolerances can be very similar to other medical issues and attempting to diagnose yourself can be very dangerous. Even simply eliminating the foods you think are a problem before speaking with your doctor isn't recommended because it can make it difficult to get an accurate diagnosis. If you want to take an active role in your health care, consider keeping a symptom, food and activity diary. This can provide your doctor with important information and hopefully get you to a solution quickly.



REFERENCES:

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