

# Options Center Health Topic

## FOOD ALLERGIES AND INTOLERANCES

### What is the prevalence of food allergy reactions?

According to the USFDA, true food allergies only affect 2% of adults, and 2 to 8% of children (USFDA, 1994). In most individuals, food allergies usually decrease over time.

### Why do allergic reactions occur?

The allergic reaction starts when the immune system receives a signal that an unfavorable substance (an allergen) is present in the body. The immune system then looks to the body's natural antibodies to seek out and destroy the allergen. Allergic reactions do not always occur immediately after the allergen has been eaten and reactions can occur within a few seconds to a few hours.

### Where do reactions occur?

The most common physiological characteristics of allergy reactions occur at the following places: mouth (swelling of the lips or tongue, itchy lips), airways (wheezing or breathing problems), digestive tract (stomach cramping, vomiting and diarrhea) and skin (hives, rashes, or eczema) (USFDA, 1994).

### What causes food allergies in children?

According to the USFDA (1994), "allergists believe that infant allergies are the result of immunologic immaturity and, to some extent, intestinal immaturity."



### Histamine Allergies

Although the word histamine usually is often associated with negative reactions, the actual purpose of histamines is to protect the body and fight off foreign invaders. Foods that trigger histamine reactions include wheat, grains, concord grapes, apples, berries, etc.



### What is the prevalence of food intolerant reactions?

Intolerance to certain foods affects a much larger portion of the population than food allergies. It is believed that up to 80 percent of African-American, Mediterranean, and Hispanic populations suffer from lactose (dairy) intolerance.

### What is a food intolerance?

The difference between a food intolerance and a food allergy is that a food intolerance is a metabolic problem, not the immune system (as in food allergies). In food intolerance, the problem is often the body lacks certain (intestinal) enzymes necessary for the proper utilization and digestion of foods.

### What are the physiological symptoms of food intolerance?

The most common indication of a food intolerant reaction is abdominal cramping and discomfort. Other common symptoms may include:

- Drowsiness to hyperactivity in children
- Itching and rashes
- Headaches
- High blood pressure
- Arthritic pain
- Painful gas
- Bloating
- Diarrhea
- Flatulence



Often food intolerant symptoms are subtle, delayed in reaction time, chronic and considered "normal" and remain unnoticed.

### How can a hair analysis indicate the presence of food allergies and /or intolerance?

Hair analysis can help determine a person's metabolic rate. Allergies are often present in fast metabolizers where there are low levels of calcium present. Dr. Watts (1995) explains, "grains and cereals contain phytic acid that can inhibit calcium absorption and thereby contribute to hyperactive episodes in susceptible children." It is important to mention that slow metabolizers can suffer from food allergies and food intolerances as well.

Information adapted from Diagnos-Techs literature, Dr. David Watts' book, *Trace Elements & Other Essential Nutrients*, and Center for Science in the Public Interest information.