

Zero Tolerance



Are your food intolerances wreaking havoc on your health? A simple test can help you find out.

BY SUZAN BIANCHI

tomatoes. Oranges. Sweet potatoes. Sounds like the start of a healthy grocery list, but if your body can't tolerate these foods, they may be doing more harm than good.

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“Food intolerance is a broad term for any kind of reaction to food,” says Dr. Patricia Wales, a Calgary-based naturopathic doctor who sits on the boards of the Canadian Association of Naturopathic Doctors and the Alberta Association of Naturopathic Practitioners. “An intolerance usually means that the body cannot break down a certain food.”

Food intolerance, however, is not to be confused with a food allergy. Food allergies (such as to peanuts, shellfish or gluten) affect the immune system; food intolerances do not. But while intolerance will not cause the same immediate and sometimes life-threatening reaction, they can wreak havoc on your system.

“Food intolerance is a very individual thing,” explains Dr. Wales. “Symptoms can be very broad and, while not immediate, can build over time.” Those who are lactose intolerant know this well. Some experience gas, diarrhea or abdominal pain, discomfort or bloating every time they drink milk or eat cheese; others can ingest small amounts and feel fine.

While problems with digestion is one common symptom, other parts of your body may show signs: for example, your neurological system (lack of balance), skin (eczema, rashes), lungs (asthma) and joints (swelling, arthritis). The gut, however, is where it all starts. “We do know that gut inflammation can affect the blood stream and the lymphatic system. A yeast overgrowth, for example, can disrupt the gut barrier,” says Dr. Wales. That can lead to “leaky gut” and trigger a slew of problems that, at the surface, seem unrelated to digestion.

Take Noanie*, for example. At 44, she can finally control the cystic acne on her neck and chin that started about four years ago. “I spent thousands of dollars trying to clear up my cystic acne, but nothing worked,” she says. She tried popular over-the-counter products such as Proactiv and even prescription creams. It wasn’t until her doctor wrote her a prescription for Accutane that she decided to take another course of action and test for food intolerances.

Traditionally, testing involves an elimination diet that removes suspected foods from a diet for a certain period of time (usually two weeks to one month) and reintroduces them one at a time. If one or more symptoms reappear once a food has been reintroduced, then that food is identified as the culprit. Done with guidance from a medical or naturopathic doctor, this method does take some time – from several weeks to several months.

Noanie tried an elimination diet, but found that “it wasn’t

precise enough” and decided to try an alternative method, the Gemoscan Food Intolerance Test. To put it simply, blood is taken and combined with food allergen extracts and run through special equipment to measure response. Of course, the process is much more complicated than that — and is patent pending — but it does mean that with one vial of blood, as many as 250 foods and food additives are screened and results are ready in about five days.

“My Gemoscan test came back showing 12 foods on my ‘severe intolerance’ list,” she says. “Included were strawberries, oranges, tomatoes, sweet potatoes, bananas, honey — all of my favourite things.” In January 2007, she cut out those foods, and those flagged for “moderate intolerance” (including eggs and pork) and tried to stay away from dairy and sugar, too. “Within a few weeks, I noticed my acne was clearing up and getting better every week.”

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This past summer, she did have a relapse. With cottage season and barbeques in full force, she strayed from her strict eating regime: “My crappy diet came back and so did my cystic acne.” Within a few months, though, she was back on track – and her complexion proved it.

Today, several testing options exist; Gemoscan is just one alternative method. The *Alternative Medicine Review* (Volume 9, Number 2, 2004) identifies “kinesiology (which uses loss in muscle strength as an indicator of food sensitivity), Vega testing (which uses a machine to measure electromagnetic pulses through the body), and Carroll testing (which measures intolerance to a food by running an electric current through a small sample of the subject’s blood)” as diagnostic tests that are not recognized by conventional medicine.

Food intolerances can be difficult to pinpoint, especially since so many foods we eat today contain a cocktail of ingredients and additives. But finding the trigger is only half the battle. From there, it’s important to have the right advice and guidance (like that provided from a naturopathic doctor) so that a customized eating plan — including the proper rotation of foods — can be developed. [e](#)

*Noanie’s last name has been withheld to protect her privacy.