Food intolerance can have a number of different causes; some people may make abnormal antibodies (IgG, different from the IgE that causes allergy) which mistakenly “fight off” the food when they eat it; others may be lacking an enzyme that is required for proper digestion of the food. Some people seem to be upset by chemicals that occur naturally in the food, and which don’t affect others. This means that there is no easy blood test or skin prick test to identify intolerance (except for one or two well-researched intolerances such as gluten intolerance and lactose intolerance). Some tests have been developed that may be helpful in identifying intolerances, but none of them give a definite answer; they can only guide us about what might be causing a problem, but this then needs careful checking.

In a few people, underlying conditions such as low levels of digestive enzymes, the presence of the wrong mix of bacteria in the gut, parasites or excessive yeast levels can make food intolerances worse. In these cases treatment for the underlying condition may be required in order to allow symptoms to improve. You should always seek advice rather than attempt to diagnose or treat these problems yourself.
What Is Food Allergy?

Food allergies occur when the body’s immune system inappropriately fights against a food protein. Your body reacts by producing antibodies against the allergen, which causes a release of chemical mediators, such as histamine, from mast cells. The mediators cause various allergic symptoms, such as running nose and hives, and in extreme cases, life-threatening anaphylaxis. These symptoms usually occur from minutes to two hours after eating. With a clear history of allergic reactions toward one or more foods, food allergies can be confirmed by skin prick test and/or blood test (specific IgE).

What Are the Symptoms of Food Allergy?

- Running nose
- Watery eyes
- Itchy eyes, nose or ears
- Hives
- Rashes
- Swelling of tongue and lips
- Vomiting
- Wheezing
- Difficulty in breathing
- Anaphylaxis (shortness of breath and a drop in blood pressure)

What Are the Common Food Allergens?

- Cow’s milk
- Eggs
- Soy
- Wheat
- Shellfish (crustaceans and mollusks)
- Fish
- Peanuts
- Tree nuts (almonds, brazil nuts, cashews, hazelnuts, macadamia nuts, pecans, pistachios or walnuts)

The above eight common allergens account for about 90% of all allergic reactions; they are required to be labelled under the HK food law and in other countries. Other common allergens required to be labelled in some other countries include:

- Mustard seeds
- Sesame seeds
- Pine Seeds
- Kiwi

What Is Food Intolerance?

Unlike food allergy, the cause of food intolerance is unclear but can happen when your body does not sufficiently digest or metabolize a food. Symptoms of food intolerances are often delayed and can happen hours or days after eating the foods. An example of food intolerance would be lactose intolerance, with which your body cannot digest the milk sugar, “lactose”, in dairy products sufficiently, and resulting in symptoms like abdominal gas, bloating, cramps and diarrhea. Diagnosis of food intolerance can only be done with elimination followed by reintroduction of the suspected food or ingredients. A registered dietitian can help you with that.

What Are the Signs of Food Intolerance?

- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Abdominal pain
- Bloating
- Headache
- Hives
- Swelling
- Rashes
- Fatigue
- Irritable bowel

What Should I Do If I Think I Have Food Allergy or Intolerance?

If you think you have food allergy or intolerance, you should seek medical help, and it would be helpful to keep a detailed food and symptom diary. The diary should clearly document the time of eating, the food and ingredients you ate (with cooking methods and quantities), and the time and types of symptoms associated with the foods. Please see below for an example of food diary:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Food</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Symptoms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:30</td>
<td>Milk 1 cup</td>
<td>10:30</td>
<td>Abdominal cramp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fried egg 2 pc</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ham 1 pc</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wheat toast 1 slice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:00</td>
<td>Chocolate 2 pc</td>
<td>13:00</td>
<td>Diarrhea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Braised Pork x 100 g</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Boiled Chinese vegetables 150 g</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16:00</td>
<td>Cafe Latte 1 cup</td>
<td>18:00</td>
<td>Abdominal cramp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cheesecake ½ slice</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bloating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Diarrhea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20:00</td>
<td>Rice 1 bowl</td>
<td>21:00</td>
<td>Diarrhea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Steamed shrimps 10 pc</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stir-fried green beans and beef ½ bowl</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22:00</td>
<td>Green apple 1 pc</td>
<td>22:00</td>
<td>Rashes around mouth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other common allergens required to be labelled in some other countries include:

- Joint pains
- Nettle rash
- Eczema
- Migraine

What Are the Symptons of Food Intolerance?

- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Abdominal pain
- Bloating
- Headache
- Hives
- Swelling
- Rashes
- Fatigue
- Irritable bowel

What Are the Common Food Allergens?

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