

FA/10: Food intolerance

1.0 Food intolerance

- 1.1 Food intolerance does not involve the immune system. Reactions may be triggered by an inability to digest a particular food and although not usually immediately life threatening can be a debilitating and distressing condition.
- 1.2 Symptoms are not usually immediate, however can be unpleasant and severe in some cases, and can affect long-term health.
- 1.3 Some people can tolerate a reasonable amount of the food, but if they eat too much (or too often) they get symptoms because their body cannot tolerate unlimited amounts and when the offending food/s are eaten on a regular basis each reaction effectively runs into the next one, thereby leading to the development of chronic, almost continual symptoms.
- 1.4 There are many foods that people can be intolerant to, however the most common are; milk & lactose, gluten & wheat, preservatives, naturally occurring compounds such as caffeine etc.

2.0 Symptoms of food intolerance

- 2.1 Food intolerance is much more common than food allergy, with the onset of symptoms tending to be slower and of which may be delayed by many hours after eating the offending food/s.
- 2.2 The range of symptoms is much broader than that of food allergy and of which can be general and non-specific, to mention but a few:
 - abdominal pain/aches/pains
 - asthma/wheezing
 - bloating/constipation
 - chronic fatigue/lethargy
 - irritable bowel syndrome
 - headaches/migraine
 - nausea
 - eczema/rashes/urticaria/skin problems
 - rhinitis/sinusitis
- 2.3 Food intolerance may be attributed to several different causative agents.

3.0 Enzyme effects

- 3.1 Most foods require some enzyme activity in their digestion, however when the body cannot produce enough of a particular enzyme required to break down natural substances within food this is when intolerance occurs.
- 3.2 When these enzymes are either missing or in short supply, then eating the offending food/s can cause symptoms because part of the content of the food cannot be digested effectively.
- 3.3 In the case of 'lactose intolerance', the body lacks the enzyme *lactase* that breaks down lactose (milk sugar) into smaller sugars ready for absorption from the gut. Lactose is too large to be absorbed across the wall of the gut undigested.

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4.0 Pharmacological

- 4.1 Certain foods contain naturally occurring chemicals that have an effect on the body, such as caffeine in coffee, tea and chocolate or amines in certain cheeses.
- 4.2 Some people seem to be more affected than others by these natural substances in the food, causing symptoms which would not occur in other people unless they ate far larger quantities of the food.

5.0 Naturally occurring toxins in food

- 5.1 Several foods contain naturally occurring substances that can exert a toxic effect causing symptoms of vomiting and diarrhoea. For example if kidney beans or chick peas are undercooked, there may be '*afatoxins*' which cause these symptoms; however if cooked effectively the toxins are destroyed and therefore not present

6.0 Histamine in foods

- 6.1 Histamine naturally occurs in some foods, for example certain fish that is not fresh and has not been stored correctly maybe prone to develop a build-up of histamine in their flesh as they age.
- 6.2 In particular people, naturally occurring histamine within food may cause symptoms once the food has been eaten, typically; rashes, stomach pain, diarrhoea and vomiting.

7.0 Salicylates in foods

- 7.1 Salicylates are organic acids used in syntheses as a plant hormone and are found in several foods, and of which a person's tolerance level may vary; however most people are able to eat foods containing salicylates with no adverse effects.
- 7.2 People who are 'salicylate-intolerant' will get better if they eat a diet of low and moderate salicylate foods and avoid those that contain high-levels. Salicylates can be found in unripe fruit and vegetables, such as; blackberries, kiwi fruit, peppers, almonds, chestnuts, mushrooms etc.

8.0 Additives in foods

- 8.1 A broad range of both natural and artificially made additives are used in colouring, preserving and processing foods. Symptoms in certain people may be provoked by a hypersensitivity to these food additives.

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