

Food Allergies: How to Live with Them

Food allergies can be a pain (literally) to live with. Some are much more severe than others, with the most severe allergies, called [anaphylactic](#), potentially fatal. Allergic reactions vary from mild skin rash, slight cough, or itchy throat, to stomach cramps and diarrhea, to heart failure, complete throat/airway obstruction, or unconsciousness.

The Function of the Immune System

Common to all allergic reactions is the fact that our immune systems treat the allergen as a foreign substance. Our immune systems are designed to protect us, so when such a foreign and potentially dangerous substance (called an allergen) is identified, the body goes into attack mode.

In the case of an anaphylactic reaction, the immune system produces massive amounts of histamines which cause the muscles in the lungs to contract, blood vessels to dilate and heart muscle to overwork to a point of heart failure.

A non-anaphylactic, but potentially just as painful, reaction results when the allergen results in the production of antibodies that are deposited in many organs throughout the body. This is called a [CHRONIC](#) reaction, meaning not acute.

This buildup of antibodies takes years to accumulate, so reactions are often hard to diagnose and identify. Symptoms can mimic asthma, arthritis, high cholesterol and more.

My [WHEAT](#) allergy is this chronic, yet painful and unhealthy type of food allergy.

Wheat or Gluten Allergies and Gastrointestinal Disorders

There are many misconceptions of wheat and gluten allergies as well as other gastrointestinal disorders. Here are some of the important facts:

- People allergic to wheat and or gluten can and do have anaphylactic reactions as described above.
- It is a protein in the wheat that is the culprit in wheat allergies. Gluten is one of, but not the only protein found in wheat that can cause allergic reactions. So if you are allergic to wheat you do not have to be allergic to gluten, but if you are allergic to gluten, you are allergic to wheat.
- Gluten is present in wheat, barley and rye. Semolina, spelt and kamut are less common types of wheat that contain gluten.
- Oats do not contain gluten, but most products that contain oats have the possibility of cross contamination from gluten within the grains listed above. For this reason, people that suffer from celiac disease or a gluten allergy often avoid oats too.
- Celiac disease results when the allergic reaction to gluten happens within the small intestine. Most people are aware that celiac disease causes digestive problems such as bloating, gas and diarrhea, but are unaware that edema, fatigue and anemia are common symptoms as well. Diagnosis is made from a biopsy of the small intestine.
- Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) causes similar symptoms to celiac disease and chronic food allergies but affects the large intestine. It is often caused by a bacterial imbalance within the digestive system, and can often be treated with a probiotic.
- Crohn's disease causes intermittent patches of inflammation between normal patches within the whole

gastrointestinal (GI) tract, but predominantly the lower small intestine and upper large intestine (colon). The inflammation can extend through the layers of the intestines into surrounding mesentery (tissue). The cause of Crohn's disease is suspected to be related to an overactive immune system.

- Ulcerative Colitis usually starts in the rectum and extends upward into the large intestine. It only involves the inner lining of the intestine and is more localized (not patchy) than Crohns. Although diet and stress aggravate UC, the exact cause is still unknown, but also thought to be linked to the immune system of its victims.

Removing Wheat or Gluten from your Diet

Many people not diagnosed with a gluten or wheat allergy have chosen to eliminate those substances from their diets because they believe that fewer carbohydrates in their diet can result in a healthier lifestyle. As suspected by many doubters, this decision may turn out to be temporary like many other fad diets that have come and gone.

If you suffer from the symptoms common to the conditions listed above and cannot control them with your diet, seek advice from your doctor. Why people choose to eliminate wheat and gluten from their diets does not matter if their lives are improved.

Unfortunately, for many of us, it is not an option.

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