

# Food Allergy and Intolerances

Food allergies or food intolerances affect nearly everyone at some point. People often have an unpleasant reaction to something they ate and wonder if they have a food allergy. One out of three people either say that they have a food allergy or that they modify the family diet because a family member is suspected of having a food allergy. But only about three percent of children have clinically proven allergic reactions to foods. In adults, the prevalence of food allergy drops to about one percent of the total population.

The most common symptoms of food allergy are hives, skin rash, diarrhea, vomiting, runny nose and sneezing.

This difference between the clinically proven prevalence of food allergy and the public perception of the problem is in part due to reactions called "food intolerances" rather than food allergies. A food allergy is an abnormal response to a food that is triggered by the immune system. The immune system is not responsible for the symptoms of food intolerance, even though these symptoms can resemble those of a food allergy.

## Common Food Allergies

The most common foods to cause allergic reactions include:

- Shellfish (shrimp, lobster, crab)
- Eggs
- Peanuts
- Milk
- Tree nuts (walnuts, almonds)
- Soy
- Fish
- Wheat.

Beef, chicken, chocolate, corn, oats, oranges, pork and white potato cause food allergy less often. Adults usually do not lose their allergies, but children can sometimes outgrow them. Children are more likely to outgrow allergies to milk or soy than allergies to peanuts, fish, or shrimp. The foods that adults or children react to are those foods they eat often. In Japan, for example, rice allergy is more frequent. In Scandinavia, codfish allergy is more common.

## Common Food Intolerances

The most common food intolerances include:

- Contaminated food (by bacteria from improper handling)
- Histamine (some cheeses and wines, tuna, mackerel, fresh strawberries)
- Lactose (milk sugar)
- Food enhancers (Yellow dye No. 5, monosodium glutamate [MSG], sulfites)
- Gluten or wheat intolerance

## Elimination Diets

The easiest way to determine if you suffer from food allergy is to eliminate all suspect-offending foods from your diet for one week. If the symptoms resolve, try adding back several small portions of one food every other day. If your symptoms recur, you probably have an allergy to that food.

For more information on "Food Allergy and Intolerances" go to:

<http://www.niaid.nih.gov/factsheets/food.htm>