

## Common food intolerances and how to identify them.

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### Introduction

Food intolerances are becoming increasingly recognized as a significant health concern, affecting many individuals worldwide. Unlike food allergies, which involve the immune system, food intolerances typically stem from the digestive system's inability to properly break down certain foods or components within them. Identifying food intolerances can be challenging because symptoms often overlap with other conditions or may appear hours after consuming the offending food. Here's a detailed look at some common food intolerances and effective strategies to identify them [1].

One of the most prevalent food intolerances, lactose intolerance occurs due to insufficient production of lactase, the enzyme that breaks down lactose found in dairy products. Symptoms include bloating, diarrhea, and abdominal pain, typically appearing within 30 minutes to 2 hours after consuming dairy [2].

Gluten sensitivity, also known as non-celiac gluten sensitivity (NCGS), involves difficulty digesting gluten, a protein found in wheat, barley, and rye. Symptoms such as bloating, diarrhea, fatigue, and headaches may arise hours to days after gluten consumption. Unlike celiac disease, gluten sensitivity does not involve the immune system [3].

Celiac disease is an autoimmune disorder triggered by the ingestion of gluten. It damages the small intestine and interferes with nutrient absorption. Symptoms can range from gastrointestinal issues like diarrhea and abdominal pain to fatigue, skin rashes, and weight loss. Diagnosis requires specific blood tests and often a biopsy of the small intestine [4].

Histamine intolerance occurs when there's an excess of histamine in the body or an inability to break it down. Histamine is found in fermented foods, aged cheeses, and certain alcoholic beverages. Symptoms include headaches, nasal congestion, hives, and digestive issues, typically appearing soon after consuming histamine-rich foods [5].

Fructose malabsorption is the inability to absorb fructose efficiently. It's commonly found in fruits, honey, and high-fructose corn syrup. Symptoms include bloating, gas, and diarrhea, often appearing shortly after consuming foods high in fructose [6].

FODMAPs (fermentable oligosaccharides, disaccharides, monosaccharides, and polyols) are carbohydrates that can be poorly absorbed in the small intestine. Individuals with irritable

bowel syndrome (IBS) or other gastrointestinal conditions may be sensitive to FODMAPs, leading to symptoms like bloating, gas, and abdominal pain [7].

Soy intolerance involves difficulty digesting proteins found in soybeans and soy-based products. Symptoms may include digestive upset, skin reactions, and respiratory issues. Identifying soy intolerance requires eliminating soy from the diet and reintroducing it to observe symptoms [8].

Egg intolerance can manifest as digestive discomfort, skin reactions like hives or eczema, or respiratory symptoms such as wheezing or nasal congestion. It's often diagnosed through an elimination diet where eggs are removed, and symptoms are monitored upon reintroduction [9].

Shellfish intolerance can lead to symptoms like hives, swelling, nausea, and vomiting shortly after consuming shellfish such as shrimp, crab, or lobster. Severe cases can cause anaphylaxis, a life-threatening allergic reaction that requires immediate medical attention [10].

### Conclusion

Understanding and managing food intolerances requires patience and diligence. By identifying problematic foods and making informed dietary choices, individuals can significantly improve their quality of life and overall health. If you suspect you have a food intolerance, seek professional guidance to develop a personalized plan that addresses your specific needs and ensures nutritional balance.

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