

## Food Sensitivities

Many of the chronic health problems that plague Americans today are the result of poor dietary and lifestyle choices. Illnesses such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, hypertension, cancer, and gastrointestinal problems develop as a consequence of the foods we choose. Nutrition is the backbone of naturopathic medicine. By changing our diets and adopting a healthy lifestyle, we can often change or reverse the course of an illness and restore health.

What we eat impacts every cell in our body: you are what you eat. Unfortunately, the importance of nutrition is downplayed in our society. Foods can and do have a positive and negative impact on our health. One way food can have a negative impact on the body is from food sensitivities (also known as food intolerances), which are often incorrectly referred to as food allergies. A food allergy is an immune response to a food that is eaten. People who have a true allergy to a food (common examples are peanuts or strawberries) are usually aware of it and avoid the food due to the immediate and strong immunologic reaction that occurs (e.g., swelling, hives). A food sensitivity is a physiological reaction (e.g., headache, diarrhea) to a food that is eaten. However, no immune response is initiated.

Often people refer to a food allergy when they mean food sensitivity. Food allergies are generally easy to determine through allergy testing or history of immune response. Food sensitivities can be more difficult to determine because reactions can be delayed (up to 48 hours) or more subtle. Also, it can be difficult to determine which food is actually causing a symptom, or if the symptom is caused by food or another pathological condition. Food sensitivity symptoms are many and varied. They include headache, diarrhea, constipation, sinus congestion, sore throat, and joint pain.

But food sensitivities are more complex than just a symptom. When a food is eaten that the body does not tolerate, the stomach and intestines can become inflamed. Because of the inflammation, the gut walls develop little openings that bits of undigested or partially digested food can pass through. This is referred to as leaky gut syndrome. When these particles enter the bloodstream, the body's immune system recognizes them as foreign and attacks them. Thus, an immune response is initiated at this point, but it is still not identified as a true food allergy.

Eliminating food sensitivities from the diet is important. Determining which foods one is sensitive to can be a challenge. Naturopathic physicians are trained to monitor elimination and challenge diets and can provide guidance during the process.

### Common Food Sensitivities

- wheat products (pasta, breads, processed foods)
- glutenous grains (rye, barley, oats, spelt, kamut, seitan, hops)
- dairy products (cow milk, cheese, yogurt, cream)
- corn products (tortilla, chips, polenta, cornstarch, thickeners)
- peanuts (peanut butter, peanut oil)
- soy products (tofu, tempeh, soy milk, soy protein powder, soy oil)
- red meat (usually more a problem with additives than with the protein itself)
- caffeine (coffee, tea, colas)
- chocolate
- sugar substitutes (aspartame, saccharine)
- food colorings, dyes
- pesticides and chemical spoilage retardants
- sulfites (canned vegetables, tuna, albacore, fruits, wines)

### Read labels

Vegetable protein, thickening agents, and stabilizers are either wheat, corn, or soy. It is much easier simply to avoid processed food than to determine all the additives in prepared foods.