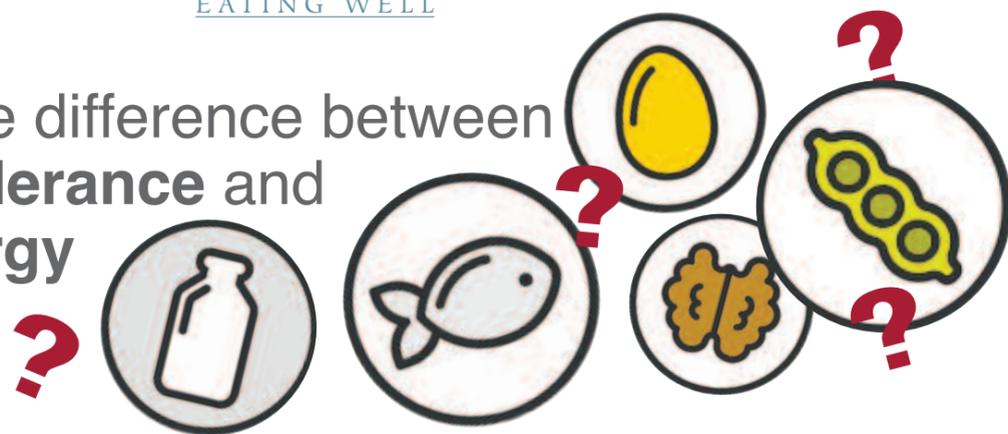


EATING WELL

Spotting the difference between a food intolerance and a food allergy



Physical reactions to certain foods are common, but most are caused by a food intolerance rather than a food allergy. While bothersome, food intolerance is a less serious condition that does not involve the immune system. A food intolerance can cause some of the same signs and symptoms as a food allergy, but it does not cause severe allergic reactions (known as anaphylaxis) and does not show on allergy testing. So a true food allergy causes an immune system reaction that affects numerous organs in the body due to the release of chemicals (known as immunoglobulin E (IgE)) as a response to specific proteins in the offending food. This response can lead to anaphylaxis. This response does not happen in food intolerance.

The table below shows the main differences between food allergy and food intolerance:

Examples of food INTOLERANCES:

■ Absence of an enzyme needed to fully digest a food.

Lactose intolerance is a common example where the body produces insufficient quantities of the enzyme lactase reducing the ability to digest lactose, the main sugar in milk products. Lactose intolerance can cause bloating, cramping, diarrhoea and excess gas. (Note: milk allergy is **not** the same as lactose intolerance.)

■ Irritable bowel syndrome.

This chronic condition can cause cramping, constipation and diarrhoea.

■ Sensitivity to food additives.

Some people have digestive reactions and other symptoms after eating certain food additives. For

	Allergy	Shared symptoms	Intolerance
Symptoms	Rash and/or hives	Nausea	Gas, cramps, bloating
	Itchy skin	Diarrhoea	Heart burn
	Shortness of breath	Vomiting	Headaches
	Chest pain		Irritability
	Sudden drop in blood pressure		Mouth ulcers
	Trouble swallowing		
	IS LIFE THREATENING		IS NOT LIFE THREATENING
Timing of symptoms	Quickly after eating the food (usually within 2 hours)		Can take hours (up to 72 hours)
Frequency of symptoms	Every time the food is eaten		Won't happen every time food is eaten
	Only need to eat a little to have symptoms		May need to eat a lot of it
Foods that commonly cause the problems	Peanuts		Wheat / gluten
	Tree nuts		Milk / dairy (unable to digest lactose)
	Eggs		Corn
	Milk		Eggs
	Fish / shellfish		Sugar

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example, sulphites used to preserve dried fruit, canned goods and wine can trigger asthma attacks in sensitive people.

■ Sensitivity to natural chemicals found in foods.

The most common ones to upset people are glutamate, amines and salicylates. Amines naturally occur in pineapples, vegetables, red wine, chocolate, citrus fruit and mature cheese. Salicylates are found in a wide variety of herbs, spices, fruit and vegetables. Glutamate occurs naturally in foods such as tomatoes, soy sauce, mushrooms, and some cheeses.

■ Recurring stress or psychological factors.

Sometimes the mere thought of a food may make you sick. The reason is not fully understood.

Celiac disease:

Celiac disease is the in-between condition as it, like a food allergy, involves an immune system response, but it's a unique reaction that's more complex than a simple food allergy. While celiac disease is sometimes referred to as a gluten allergy, it does not result in anaphylaxis.

This chronic digestive condition is triggered by eating gluten, a protein found in bread, pasta, cookies and many other foods containing wheat, barley or rye.

If you have celiac disease and eat foods containing gluten, an immune reaction occurs that causes damage to the surface of your small intestine, leading to an inability to absorb certain nutrients. Hence people with celiac disease must strictly avoid eating any foods containing gluten.

Celiac disease can be screened for by use of a blood test, but a definite diagnosis requires a small bowel biopsy. These tests have to be carried out while eating a diet with gluten in.

'Non-coeliac gluten sensitivity' describes a set of symptoms people attribute to dietary gluten, but the cause and treatment is not well understood. Emerging research indicates it may not be gluten that is the problem and that the malabsorption of fermentable sugars (FODMAPs) may be the culprit in those with Irritable Bowel Syndrome.



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