



Food Intolerance & Digestion



When good food bites back . . .

Fresh fruits, vegetables, milk, and whole wheat are healthy foods you should eat regularly, right?

Not necessarily - if you have a food intolerance.

What is food intolerance?

Most of us know that processed foods, fried foods and too much caffeine are hard on the gut, but don't expect healthy foods like whole grains, dairy products, eggs and vegetables to cause problems. Even though these foods are usually healthy, for someone with food intolerance, these foods can bite back.

Food intolerance can be caused by any food: foods you eat all the time, or foods you seldom eat. With food intolerance, your immune system sees the food (antigen) as a foreign invader and produces antibodies to it. These IgG antibodies combine with the food antigen and create a complex. The body tries to eliminate these complexes but if there are too many, it falls behind and the complexes get deposited in tissues, causing inflammation and tissue damage. The best way to prevent or improve symptoms and illnesses associated with food intolerance is to test and identify the offending foods and remove them from the diet.

Food intolerance differs from immediate onset IgE food allergies in that IgE reactions happen minutes to hours after a food is eaten, whereas IgG reactions take hours or days to develop. Digestive disorders like Irritable Bowel Syndrome and Leaky Gut Syndrome have been linked to food intolerance. Some autoimmune diseases have also been linked to food intolerance and digestive issues.

Digestion and Health

The digestive system is vital to good health because:

- nutrients are absorbed in the GI tract: primarily through the cells of the small intestine.
- the lining of the gut is home to about 70% of our immune system. This makes the gut the most crucial defense against food allergens, food-borne infections and food toxins.

Food intolerance may develop if the gut lining has been disturbed by factors like stress, anti-inflammatory drugs, antibiotics, and candida infections. Inflammation in the gut lining can cause it

to fail to distinguish between the nutrient and waste portions of food, leaving some foods improperly digested. These partially digested food proteins are seen as harmful invaders, and IgG antibodies are released.

The IgG antibody-food antigen complexes deposit in the gut lining and cause irritation and inflammation. From then on, every time that food is consumed, the immune system in the gut sees it as something dangerous and sends antibodies to attack it. The inflamed gut lining can also trigger intolerance to a wider variety of foods because it makes the digestive system unable to process foods effectively.

Leaky Gut Syndrome

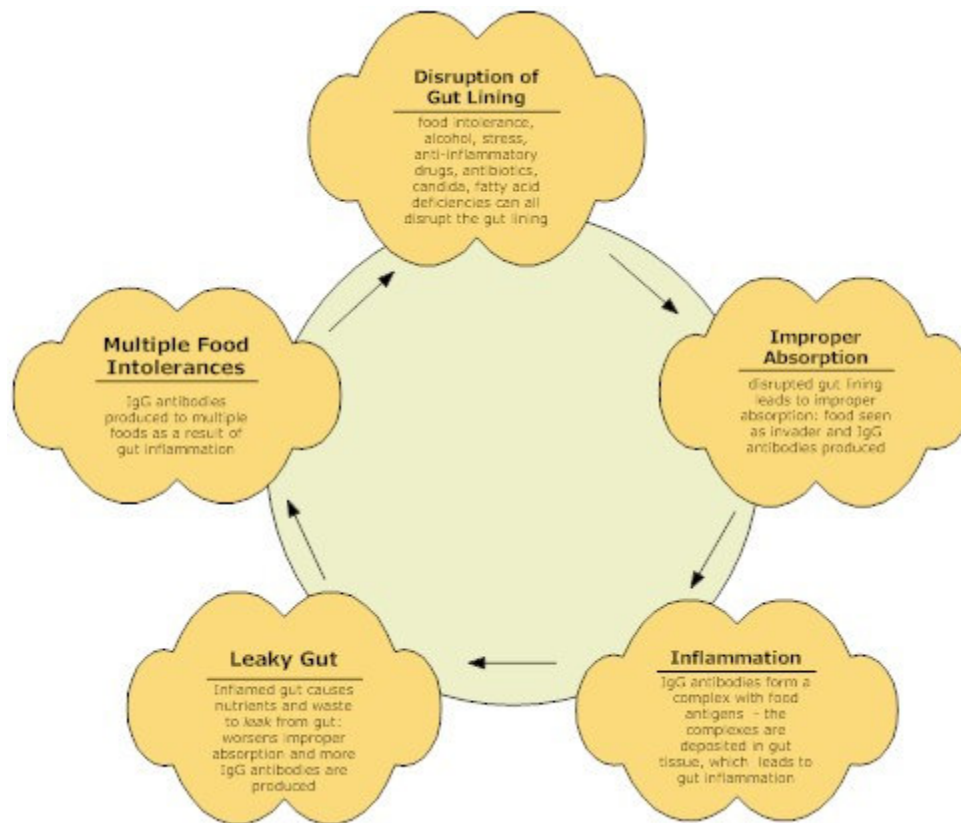
Leaky gut syndrome can be both a cause and a consequence of food intolerance:



Having a leaky gut causes improper absorption and elimination of foods, increasing the likelihood of IgG reactions to multiple foods.

- Leaky gut syndrome is a consequence of food intolerance in that the IgG antibody-antigen complexes deposit in the gut lining and cause inflammation. Leaky gut worsens when the problem food is consumed regularly because the constant influx of antibody-antigen complexes inflames the digestive tract and makes it even more permeable.

Food intolerance testing can help identify the offending foods. You are more likely to develop food intolerance when your gut becomes more permeable. When a large number of reactions show up on testing, it is usually an indication of leaky gut syndrome. Once the reactive foods are removed the gut inflammation resolves, and then it is worth retesting to see if all the same foods continue to cause reactions. Once the leaky gut is healed, many of the previous food intolerances disappear.



Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)

It is estimated that between 10 and 15% of the population suffers from irritable bowel syndrome: a condition associated with bloating, alternating diarrhea and constipation, and abdominal discomfort. Few prescription drugs have been promoted to relieve the symptoms associated with IBS, and little improvement was seen in any case. Unlike drug therapy, food intolerance testing goes straight to the cause of IBS: the foods themselves. By eliminating foods that cause reactions, it is possible to find true relief from IBS symptoms. A landmark study on food intolerance and IBS was done in Great Britain in 2004.

The Study

In 2004, British researchers selected 150 patients with irritable bowel syndrome and randomly assigned them to one of two groups:

Group 1: received a diet excluding all the foods to which patients showed a positive IgG reaction

Group 2: received a ' sham' diet excluding the same number of foods to which the patients showed a positive IgG reaction, but not the actual foods to which they were sensitive

Neither the researcher nor the patient knew whether the patient was receiving a true diet or a sham diet. The severity of IBS symptoms, non-IBS related symptoms, anxiety/depression and quality of life scores were obtained at the start and again after three months on either diet.

What the study showed

At the end of three months, the researchers looked at who had received which diet and found that the true diet was significantly better than the sham diet in reducing the severity of IBS symptoms. And, not surprisingly for those on the true diet, the benefit achieved was much greater when the diet was strictly adhered to. When overall symptoms were analyzed, there was also a significant difference in favor of the true diet. Thus, patients with irritable bowel syndrome see symptom improvement by eliminating foods to which they had IgG antibody reactions.

Trust Your Gut

Food intolerance may also play a role in other digestive conditions including: bloating, inflammatory bowel disease and heartburn. For people with gut-related symptoms, we often see dramatic improvement in symptoms simply by having them eliminate food allergens from their diet. So, consider a food intolerance test, and learn to trust your gut again.

References

Atkinson W. et al. *Food elimination based on IgG antibodies in irritable bowel syndrome: a randomised clinical trial.* Gut 2004;53(10):1459-64