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HUFFPOST LIVING

CANADA

Are the Foods You're Eating Friend or Foe?

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What do shellfish, tree pollen, bee stings, and peanuts all have in common? For many of you, even hearing of these things mentioned will make your skin itch, or trigger watery eyes. We have all heard about allergies and likely know a number of people who suffer from serious allergic reactions. Exposure to the above often results in an immediate allergic reaction of which create symptoms ranging from itchy skin, watery eyes, sneezing, severe anaphylaxis -- and can even result in death. Most who've experienced this type of reaction at some point in their lives subsequently have been to an allergist to get tested generally via a skin prick test and subsequently put on anti-histamine medications. Many of us have also been conditioned that this is the ONLY form of an allergic reaction that has a serious impact on our health. But is it?

An area that has been less commonly recognized and/or screened for by most doctors are food *sensitivities*. Due to the fact that sensitivities don't result in an immediate and/or severe allergic reaction, most people feel food sensitivities are more annoying than actually detrimental to our health. Unfortunately, this could not be further from the truth. As science continues to evolve and nutritional research becomes more commonplace in mainstream medical journals, food sensitivities are getting more attention than ever before with their role in the development of chronic illness. It is also rapidly being observed in clinical practice how identifying and removing food sensitivities can improve overall health and well-being, leading to a higher quality of life.

A sensitivity, by definition, is defined as a delayed type of allergic reaction. Contrary to an IgE antibody immediate allergic reaction (see above), food sensitivities provoke a delayed antibody response after exposure. For example, there are four different antibodies involved in a delayed reaction. IgG, IgA, IgM, and IgD -- each of which can have a different and significant effect on our immune system. In fact, the delayed response can take up to three weeks before symptoms appear. As you can imagine, this makes it very challenging to recognize which food, pollen, or substance is the cause of symptoms! Some of the more common health concerns that can be triggered by a food sensitivity are:

- Digestive disorders (gas, bloating, cramping, diarrhea, nausea)
- Migraines
- Weight gain
- Mood/Attention disorder (anxiety, depression, irritability, hyperactivity, lack of concentration)
- Joint pain/muscle stiffness
- Skin conditions (itching, redness, swelling, eczema, rashes)
- Lung conditions (Asthma, Bronchitis)
- Loss of memory
- Fatigue
- General malaise

Any of those sound familiar? For many people one or more of the symptoms above are experienced daily. Sadly, a large percentage of this group think that it something we just need to live with. Have you ever heard someone say "I guess this just means I'm getting old..." NO WAY. It's time stop the madness. We don't throw in the towel that easy! If you can accurately identify which foods are problematic to your unique biochemistry and remove them, you can begin to change the way you look, feel, and think -- often within a few days.

Further, not only do food sensitivities create highly irritating and uncomfortable symptoms, they may also be setting the stage for chronic disease. Currently, leading medical journals have drawn a direct connection between food sensitivities and potentially fatal auto-immune related illnesses. In addition, the inflammation created by consuming food sensitivities can reduce your ability to heal from other degenerative conditions due to the inflammation these reactions create.

Some of the more common food sensitivities are; wheat and gluten foods, dairy, soy, eggs, almonds, etc. That being said, if you have tried cutting these foods out of your diet for 3-4 weeks and are still not feeling well and suspect foods are to blame, it may be time to look into getting a food sensitivity test done. Using functional medicine, a simple blood test can measure these delayed reactions and help you 'map' out an eating plan specific to YOU. Fad diets and the latest self help diet book may be helpful for some, but these one-size fits all approaches do not work for everyone. If you're struggling with your health or just

want to reach to your best potential, I highly recommend you have your foods tested. It is time to embrace a customized medical model using functional medicine diagnostics to create our own unique 'health map'.

At the end of the day, the food we eat is the most important step in achieving optimal health. Eating is also entirely within our control. Hippocrates, the father of medicine, famously said

Let
food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food.
In other words, food can be your friend and it can be your foe. Eat accordingly!

Yours in good health,
Dr. J. Dempster, ND, FAARM, ABAHP

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