

What's the difference between food allergies and food intolerances?

Our body reacts to foods in many different ways. Imagine blindfolding a group of people and then asking them to describe an elephant. Each person would have a radically different description, depending on what part of the elephant they are describing. Although the description of the tail is radically different from that of the trunk, *both are equally true and valid*.

In this case, the “elephant” is how our body reacts to food. Each food testing method describes a different “view,” a different part of the elephant. Some examples of these different types of food testing are allergy testing (IgE and IgG), constitutional food intolerance testing, ALCAT laboratory testing, and muscle testing.

Food Allergies

Food allergies can be either IgE OR Immune globulin G (IgG) mediated reactions. IgE food allergies generally are quite obvious. Someone with a severe IgE reaction to strawberries, for example, would likely have throat swelling, hives, and difficulty breathing within seconds of ingesting a strawberry.

IgG food reactions are *delayed onset* reactions. The body responds with less severe symptoms, from *four hours to four days* after the food is ingested. These allergic reactions are much harder to track, as someone may have eaten the offending food a few *days* before a reaction is evident. If I have an IgG (delayed onset) reaction to tomatoes, for example, I might not connect the headache I have on Thursday with the tomato soup I ate on Monday.

Food Intolerances

Food intolerances are other food reactions *not* mediated by the immune system. Certain foods may cause an inflammatory reaction in the body that has nothing to do with IgE or IgG pathways. Some physicians only pay attention to food *allergies* and do not recognize that the body has other ways of reacting to foods.

Certain specialized laboratory tests have been developed to assess other types of *inflammatory reactions* in the body. I work with two types of food intolerance testing: constitutional food intolerance testing, and ALCAT Laboratory testing.

Constitutional food intolerance testing assesses the *primary* food or food group that causes inflammation in the digestive tract. They are called *constitutional* food intolerances because *they do not change over time*; they are simply part of the foundation of our body, from birth.

Over the last century a lineage of physicians has been conducting constitutional food intolerance testing. Originally developed by Dr. Albert Abrams at the turn of the

twentieth century, a few dozen physicians in the United States continue to offer the testing. If you are interested in ordering constitutional food intolerance testing, [click here](#).

ALCAT Food Intolerance Testing

ALCAT Laboratory offers another form of food intolerance testing. ALCAT (Antigen Leukocyte Cellular Antibody Test) uses a whole blood sample. The test examines the *final common inflammatory pathway* in the body. In other words, the test looks for any and all inflammatory reactions to foods. The test results divide foods into severe, moderate, mild, and no reaction.

If you are interested in order testing, please [click here](#).

Why is food testing important for my health?

The better our digestive tract functions, the better we are able to absorb nutrients and discard wastes. If our digestive system is *not* working well, even the best food and the fanciest nutritional supplements will provide very little benefit for the body. From both naturopathic and Chinese medical perspective, *the better the digestive tract is functioning, the better ALL of the rest of the body can function.*

Chinese medicine describes our physical functions more poetically than we do in the West. From Chinese medical perspective, body fat is considered “dampness,” which actually makes some sense from western medical perspective, because fat is a water-rich tissue. Other manifestations of “dampness” in the digestive tract include loose stools, gas, and bloating. The healthier the digestive tract, the less “damp” we accumulate. A Chinese medical practitioner would support a patient’s weight loss by needling points that “clear dampness,” build the digestive organs, and calm the mind (to reduce unhealthy food cravings.) He or she would also likely prescribe Chinese herbs that “clear dampness” and rebuild the digestive system.

From western medical perspective, if we eat foods that irritate the digestive tract, over time the junctions between the intestinal cells lose their integrity. Instead of having healthy, tight junctions between the cells, the inflamed intestinal cells develop “gaps,” leading to what gastroenterologists call “leaky gut syndrome.”

Normally food must be digested to very small size before passing through the intestinal cells. When we develop leaky gut syndrome, however, larger molecules of food, called “macromolecules,” cross through the intestines into the blood stream. These macromolecules are much more likely to cause allergic reactions.

True allergic reactions are called “food allergies.” Often, though, someone has been eating other foods, called “food intolerances,” that *irritate* the gut, before developing food allergies.

What are common reactions to foods intolerances and/or allergies?

Food allergies and intolerances can cause any kind of reaction in the body. Some *common* examples of food reactions include (this is a partial, not an exhaustive list):

- Acne
- Anxiety
- Arthritis
- Asthma
- Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
- Autism
- Bedwetting
- Chronic diarrhea
- Chronic fatigue
- Depression
- Diabetes
- Ear or other frequent infections
- Eczema
- Fatigue
- Hay fever symptoms (year-round)
- Headaches (tension type and migraine)
- Infertility
- Inflammatory bowel disease
- Migraine
- Muscle aches
- Obesity
- Panic attacks
- Stuffy nose
- Urticaria (skin itching, hives)
- Weight gain