



response are fairly rare, particularly in adults.

Some More Common Issues

“Most of what we’re seeing today is an uptick in food sensitivities and intolerances, terms that are often used interchangeably to describe foods that are not digested well and can challenge the immune system,” says Solana Beach, California, nutrition and fitness expert JJ Virgin, author of *The Virgin Diet*.

Newark, Delaware, medical doctor and allergist Junfang Jiao, Ph.D., attests to increased levels of testing for food allergies and sensitivities in recent years. “I can’t say there are more allergies or sensitivities, but more doctors are aware of the wide-ranging symptoms and more people are getting referred for testing,” he reports.

Many experts agree on at least one underlying cause behind the trend—a widely studied condition called leaky gut, characterized by intestinal permeability. Microscopic pinholes in an unhealthy small intestine can allow undigested nutrients to pass through intestinal walls, triggering mild immune responses, inflammation and, potentially, the onset of some diseases.

Theories of what causes leaky gut are diverse and sometimes contradictory but experts recommend consulting a medical professional if one suffers from food sensitivities. Each individual is unique, so there is no “blanket solution” for everyone.

Dysbiosis: Leaky gut is often caused by an imbalance in “good” and “bad” intestinal bacteria, sometimes called dysbiosis, says Krishnan. It can be brought on by the use of antibiotics, antibiotic residues in meats and dairy products or a diet high in sugar and processed foods.

Most interesting, he believes, is the discovery that glyphosate, the active ingredient in Monsanto’s weed killer Roundup used on genetically modified (GMO) corn and soy crops, contributes to dysbiosis, as verified by Massachusetts Institute of Technology scientists in a study published in *Interdisciplinary Toxicology*. They concluded with a plea to world governments to reconsider

FEARLESS EATING

How to Move Past Food Sensitivities

by Kathleen Barnes

Complaints of digestive upsets, brain fog, headaches, relentless food cravings and unrelieved stress appear to be at epidemic levels these days.

“These symptoms may be part of newfound awareness of the wide-ranging and seemingly unrelated health problems caused by food sensitivities and intolerances, which are different from food allergies,” explains microbiologist Kiran Krishnan, from Chicago.

Food Allergies

Food allergies seem to be plaguing America’s children now more than in the past. We know that peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, once standard lunchbox fare, have become a no-no. They’re often outlawed by schools to protect the students that experience extreme peanut allergies.

The symptoms of food allergies in

adults and children, often including hives, rashes and itching, can range from being annoying to life threatening. For extremely sensitive people, the tiniest fragment of a peanut or a bee sting, exposure to latex gloves or certain medications like penicillin can cause such a sudden strong allergic reaction that it results in anaphylaxis, which makes breathing passages swell shut. If untreated, such extreme allergies can even prove fatal, which is why people with severe allergies carry the antidote epinephrine (adrenaline) with them.

Food allergies are diagnosed by blood and/or skin testing under the supervision of a medical professional, usually a doctor of medicine, osteopathy or naturopathy. Effective treatment, which must be customized to the individual, typically entails avoidance of allergy triggers.

Fortunately, food allergies that trigger such a dramatic, fast, immune

policies regarding the safety of glyphosate residues in foods.

GMOs: While this issue has been less widely analyzed, a 1996 study published in the *Journal of Applied Microbiology* found that the *Bacillus thuringiensis* toxin added to Monsanto's GMO corn crops to kill pests is not destroyed during human digestion. Danish researchers at the Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University suggested it may damage cells of the intestinal lining.

Gluten: "Gluten causes leaky gut," says Port Jefferson, New York, naturopathic doctor Doni Wilson, author of *The Stress Remedy*, voicing one side of the controversy based on her review of scientific literature. She's concluded, "Whether you are sensitive to it or not, gluten increases the production of zonulin, which can result in damage to intestinal walls and cause the cells on the outside of the intestines to set off an immune response to anything that passes through. In this condition, what we're eating—cheese, milk, eggs, corn, soy—is leaking through the gut lining, triggering an immune response and potentially creating multiple food sensitivities."

Wilson also notes that in her clinical experience, only about half of her patients with gluten sensitivities complain of digestive issues. "I've found that gluten causes the immune cells on the outside of the small intestine to affect the nervous system, causing headaches, anxiety, depression and insomnia," she says. Her findings are backed by research from the Massachusetts General Hospital Center for Celiac Research and Italy's University of Catania. The same researchers confirm that non-celiac gluten sensitivity or intolerance can also foster depression; a University of Cincinnati study published in the journal *Headache* links gluten and headaches.

Other proteins in wheat can be problematic, advises Fiona McCulloch, a Toronto doctor of naturopathy, citing a study presented at the annual European Gastroenterology Conference, in Vienna, last October. The report showed that a family of proteins called amylase trypsin inhibitors can lead to the development of inflammation in tissues beyond the gut, including the lymph nodes, kidneys, spleen and brain.

As a gluten tolerance test, substitute an amount of non-gluten carbohydrates for the same amount of gluten-containing products.

For example, instead of two pieces of bread, substitute three-quarters of a cup of brown rice—a rough equivalent in carbohydrate content. A positive difference in hunger, cravings and energy levels when gluten is eliminated indicates a condition of gluten intolerance.

~FIONA MCCULLOCH

Glyphosate residues can be a factor in gluten intolerance. Although wheat crops produced in the U.S. are not yet genetically modified, many non-organic wheat crops are sprayed with glyphosate to promote rapid drying, according to the Environmental Working Group.

Inadequate digestive enzymes: Lactose intolerance is the most common result of missing digestive enzymes like lactase, according to the Mayo Clinic, in Rochester, Minnesota. Avoiding milk products may relieve digestive distress for some.

Eliminate Items, Then Challenge

Most experts believe the easiest way to deal with food sensitivities is to stop eating the food in question. The so-called "elimination and challenge" diet, which has been in use for decades, is effective, free and addresses the foods responsible for common food intolerances, says Virgin.

Simply avoid the food of concern completely for at least three weeks, then eat a small amount of it and catalog the results. For some people, it may only take a couple of hours for symptoms to return after eating a piece of bread, cup of milk, an egg or bit of tofu.

Virgin's seven-food challenge is a bit more rigorous, but improves feelings of general well-being so readily that many

people don't even want to bring back the eliminated foods because they feel so much better, she says. Her three-week diet completely eliminates the most common food sensitivity triggers: gluten-containing foods (largely wheat), dairy, eggs, soy, corn, peanuts, sugar and artificial sweeteners.

"When I say eliminate these foods 100 percent, I mean it," cautions Virgin. "You need to give your immune system at least that much time to cool off." She adds, "You can do anything such as this for just three weeks."

Virgin also recommends the elimination diet for weight loss because it helps overcome food cravings triggered by the immune system response and leptin resistance, leveraging the hormone that turns off the body's hunger signals, a finding confirmed by independent studies performed by Sweden's Lund University and Italy's University of Palermo. She's also documented other positive effects through her own research and experience with participants in her programs, including improvements in energy, focus, joint pain, skin clarity and bloating, all in the designated short time frames.

Other Approaches

People with food sensitivities may be able to tolerate occasional indulgences in their trigger foods once they've healed their digestive systems, notes Krishnan. Probiotics can help, especially those encapsulated in spores so they can pass through the barrage of stomach acid and reach the small intestine where they are most needed.

Krishnan's research, to be published this spring, showed that half of otherwise healthy young people suffering from leaky gut had a dramatic reduction of symptoms by taking a spore-forming probiotic *Bacillus indicus* product for 30 days. After the healing period, sensitive people may be able to eat small amounts of certain foods with the assistance of dietary aids and supplements, adds McCulloch.

Get dirty: Johns Hopkins University research has shown that kids raised in an excessively hygienic environment experience much higher rates of allergies and sensitivities. University of Wisconsin researchers found that youths growing up in households



FOOD INTOLERANCES SELF-QUESTIONNAIRE

by JJ Virgin

Answer each question with: Never (0); Seldom (1); Sometimes (2) or Often (3).

1. I need a cup of coffee or another caffeinated pick-me-up to jumpstart the middle of my morning or afternoon. ____
2. I crave baked goods, pasta and other high-sugar impact foods. ____
3. I have difficulty falling asleep or I awake during the night feeling anxious and struggle to get back to sleep. ____
4. My bowel movements occur infrequently (less than one a day), which can sometimes be painful and involve straining. ____
5. My mood can change swiftly and I take out my crankiness and irritation on coworkers and family members. ____
6. I want to lay my head down on my desk mid-morning or afternoon because I have little motivation to remain productive. ____
7. During meetings or conversations I zone out and struggle to concentrate for long periods of time on my work. ____
8. After eating a big meal, I'm hungry and craving more of what I ate several hours later. ____
9. Doing routine and important tasks takes all the energy and initiative I have. ____
10. Even as an adult, I struggle with acne, rashes or blotchy skin, even though I use expensive skin cream. ____
11. I head to the bathroom or step outside after a meal because of gassiness, bloating or other uncomfortable gut issues. ____
12. The smell of a scented candle, perfume and detergent bothers me. ____
13. Walking or moving around can create cramping, achiness or joint pain. ____
14. I develop headaches that prevent me from enjoying the moment and leave me scrambling for a pain reliever. ____
15. Even though I don't have other cold/flu symptoms, I suffer from a scratchy throat or sinus trouble. ____
16. I eat all the right foods in moderation, exercise religiously, and yet struggle intensely to lose every pound. ____

Total Score: _____

WHAT SCORES MEAN

18 or above: You most likely struggle with food intolerances that create many unpleasant symptoms and stall fat loss. By removing the seven target foods for just three weeks, you'll see these symptoms disappear and the scales will start moving again.

10 to 17: You display some of the symptoms that food intolerances can trigger. You would greatly benefit from eliminating target foods to lose symptoms and those last few pounds.

Below 10: While you suffer few of the symptoms brought about by food intolerances, you could still benefit from the same regimen. Even the healthiest person can take their game up a notch and ditch those last few stubborn pounds.

Source: *The Virgin Diet*, by JJ Virgin

that are less than obsessively sanitary among four or five other people and dogs will strengthen and challenge their immune systems as they mature. Adults need to challenge their immune systems, too, says Krishnan.

Eat organic and fermented foods: A widely varied diet helps spread out the immune system challenges of trigger foods. Organic foods don't contain glyphosate and other potentially harmful chemicals; fermented foods contain digestive enzymes.

Eat prebiotics: Raw onions, garlic, leeks and asparagus are prebiotics. They help feed probiotic bacteria and improve gut health.

Block sensitivity triggers: Many people with lactose intolerance are able to consume dairy products if they use lactase, the enzyme that helps digest lactose. Similarly, some people with gluten intolerance find they can eat moderate amounts of wheat products with protein supplements like lectin, carb blockers and digestive enzymes that help break down the gluten molecules, according to Virgin.

Supplements that might help: Glucomannan (konjac or elephant yam fiber) contributes to a feeling of fullness and stabilizes blood sugar, says McCulloch. She also recommends the amino acid L-glutamine and digestive enzymes to assist in gut healing.

Kathleen Barnes is the author of numerous natural health books. Connect at KathleenBarnes.com.