

What Should I Do If I Think I Have Food Allergy or Intolerance?

If you think you have food allergy or intolerance, you should seek medical help, and it would be helpful to keep a detailed food and symptom diary. The diary should clearly document the time of eating, the food and ingredients you ate (with cooking methods and quantities), and the time and types of symptoms associated with the foods. Please see below for an example of food diary:

Time	Food	Time	Symptoms
8:30	Milk 1 cup Fried egg 2 pc Ham 1 pc Wheat toast 1 slice		
11:00	Chocolate 2 pc	10:30	Abdominal cramp
13:00	Rice noodle 1 bowl Braised pork 100 g Boiled Chinese vegetables 150 g		
16:00	Cafe latte 1 cup Cheesecake ½ slice		
		18:00	Abdominal cramp Bloating Diarrhea
20:00	Rice 1 bowl Steamed shrimps 10 pc Stir-fried green beans and beef ½ bowl	21:00	Diarrhea
22:00	Green apple 1 pc	22:00	Rashes around mouth

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Wed: Closed all day
Sat: 9:00 am - 1:00 pm

(except in the second and fourth week of each month, the Centre will open all day Saturdays)
Closed on Sundays and Public Holidays
Consultation by Appointment

For enquiries and appointments,
please contact us



Food Allergy and Food Intolerance



What Is Food Allergy?

Food allergies occur when the body's immune system inappropriately fights against a food protein. Your body reacts by producing antibodies against the allergen, which causes a release of chemical mediators, such as histamine, from mast cells. The mediators cause various allergic symptoms, such as running nose and hives, and in extreme cases, life-threatening anaphylaxis. These symptoms usually occur from minutes to two hours after eating. With a clear history of allergic reactions toward one or more foods, food allergies can be confirmed by skin prick test and / or blood test (specific IgE).

What Are the Symptoms of Food Allergy?

- Running nose
- Watery eyes
- Itchy eyes, nose or ears
- Hives
- Rashes
- Swelling of tongue and lips
- Vomiting
- Wheezing
- Difficulty in breathing
- Anaphylaxis (shortness of breath and a drop in blood pressure)

What Are the Common Food Allergens?

- Cow's milk
- Eggs
- Soy
- Wheat
- Shellfish (crustaceans and mollusks)
- Fish
- Peanuts
- Tree nuts (almonds, brazil nuts, cashews, hazelnuts, macadamia nuts, pecans, pistachios or walnuts)

The above eight common allergens account for about 90% of all allergic reactions; they are required to be labelled under the HK food law and in other countries. Other common allergens required to be labelled in some other countries include:

- Mustard seeds
- Sesame seeds
- Pine Seeds
- Kiwi

What Is Food Allergy and Intolerance?

A food intolerance occurs when your body is not "tolerating" a food or food substance, i.e. being unable to digest, absorb, or metabolise a substance. It can lead to discomfort or allergy-like reactions. The main difference between food allergy and food intolerance is that the latter is not associated with an abnormal immune attack from your body. It can happen with a protein (e.g. gluten), a carbohydrate (e.g. lactose) or a chemical (e.g. mono-sodium glutamate, or MSG). Lactose intolerance, histamine intolerance, salicylate intolerance and MSG intolerance are some of the common food intolerances in Hong Kong.

While food allergies and food intolerances share similar symptoms, such as nausea, vomiting, bloating, diarrhoea, constipation, eczema, urticaria, runny nose and watery eyes, the reactions of food intolerances usually happen after ingestion of a large dose of suspected substances and are not always repeatable. It is likely to be a case of intolerance if one can tolerate a small amount of milk in cakes or coffee but not a whole glass of milk. In addition, symptoms of food intolerances usually appear hours to days after eating, and sometimes it takes weeks of cumulative eating before the symptoms appear.

Due to its irreproducible symptoms, food intolerances are difficult to test. Sometimes an oral challenge is used to test food intolerances by observing and analysing any symptoms after ingestion of suspected substances, e.g. the lactose breath test for lactose intolerance. Elimination diets are also often used for diagnosis of food intolerances.

Despite lack of scientific evidence, immunoglobulin (IgG) tests are used based on a claim that IgG, an immune protein, is related to a slower form of food allergy or intolerance. On the contrary, IgG has been shown to increase and is related to ingestion of food. It is an indicator for oral tolerance, not intolerance. The Hong Kong Institute of Allergy does not recommend the use of IgG test for diagnosis of food intolerances.

