

The Scary Truth About the Rise in Food Allergies

Difficult to diagnose, allergy effects can range from merely bothersome to deadly

While millions of North Americans are growing more conscious of nutrition and the effects of food on their bodies, researchers are noting a rise in food allergies in recent years.

Food allergies occur in the immune system and can lead to reactions such as hives, shortness of breath, wheezing, itching, swelling or even a life-threatening reaction called anaphylaxis, according to the American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology.¹

Some of the most common foods that cause allergic reactions include shellfish, eggs, soy, dairy products, and nuts, as well as some fruits or vegetables.

However, food allergies are often self-diagnosed and symptoms can easily be misinterpreted. Food allergies are sometimes confused with a much more common reaction known as food intolerance, such as lactose intolerance or gluten sensitivity. Though bothersome, food intolerance is a less serious condition that doesn't involve the immune system, but occurs when you have difficulty digesting a certain kind of food. But the confusion between the two makes food allergies very difficult to diagnose.

There has never been a perfect test that can confirm or rule out a food allergy. Physicians typically consider a number of factors and use several investigative methods before making a diagnosis, such as:

- Symptoms.
- Family history.
- Routine medical exams to try to identify or exclude other problems.
- Skin tests, where a small amount of the suspected food is placed on the patient's skin.
- Blood tests.
- Elimination diets, where suspected foods are eliminated for a week or two.
- Oral food challenges, where you are given a small amount of the suspected food in the doctor's office.

Doctors sometimes have great difficulty diagnosing food allergies or distinguishing them from food sensitivities. Often, the first steps in understanding any symptoms or issues that may be food-related is to study and monitor your diet, paying close attention to how you feel when you eat any given food.

With your Best Doctors benefits, a comprehensive review of your symptoms and issues can give you additional insight into your medical case, with an easy-to-read report that either confirms your diagnosis and treatment or recommends a change. If you are afraid to eat certain foods or feel you may have food allergies, Best Doctors can help you eliminate any uncertainty on your health and nutrition.

1. <http://acaai.org/allergies/types/food-allergy>

For more information, call 1.877.419.2378 or visit bestdoctors.com/canada.