



# NOT TO BE SNIFFED AT

by Sally Parr



With food allergies and intolerances on the increase, what's the difference between them and how can we help sufferers?

If it seems that every second person you meet is giving up gluten or deciding to ditch dairy, then you'd be right. Figures from Allergy UK state that almost half of the population have intolerances to various foods, 48% of adults suffer from more than one allergy and the rate of hospital admissions for anaphylaxis has increased by a whopping 615% over the past two decades - in the UK alone. Studies suggest that as many as 1 in 3 of the population believe they have allergies, but many remain undiagnosed.

But why have food allergies and intolerances (also known as sensitivities) become so

common? It's thought that a combination of factors are at work including increased exposure to pollution, changes in diet, over-cleanliness, low levels of vitamin D (needed to support a healthy immune system) and less exposure to microbes and parasites (which would normally keep the immune system busy therefore preventing it from over-reacting to harmless substances). A new theory being researched suggests that allergy antibodies can develop due to loss of skin integrity when babies have eczema. This new research is vital as reactivity to at least one allergen is becoming common among 50% of

## 'Leaky Gut' – what is it and how does it impact food intolerances?

With leaky gut, the lining of the intestine becomes a bit like a colander, losing its protective properties. This can allow undigested food particles into the bloodstream; the body's heightened response to these everyday substances can leave you feeling generally 'out of sorts' and increasingly intolerant to certain foods. As well as food triggers, it can also be impacted by imbalances in gut bacteria, medications or stress.

By restoring the integrity of the gut lining and balancing beneficial bacteria, the body may become more efficient at absorbing nutrients which may help increase tolerance to more foods.

school children, if you count seasonal and food allergies, asthma and eczema together.

But what do the different terms mean? Because allergy and intolerance are all frequently used interchangeably (especially in relation to food), there can be confusion with regards to how they differ. In a nutshell, (no pun intended), they all relate to the body responding adversely to a particular food trigger, and are increasingly becoming a global public health issue. But many presumed food allergies may not actually be allergies at all; consequently, many of these conditions often test negatively using traditional testing methods.

As Dr. Nigel Abraham, Scientific and Laboratory Director at Cambridge Nutritional Sciences explains, "Food allergy is an inappropriate, adverse immune reaction to a food which is characterised by an immediate response". Symptoms can include swelling, hives and itching, as well as difficulty breathing. Dr. Abraham confirms, "life-long avoidance of the food is necessary as it can involve severe reactions known as anaphylaxis". These are the cases we read about in the press, with the result

that non-dairy hot drinks now come complete with stickers and allergy sufferers are asked not to buy their lunch from certain chains. Common culprits can include soya, milk, peanuts, sesame, eggs, tree nuts, fish and shellfish. Due to the potential severity of the reaction, it's essential to consult your GP if you suspect you or your child are allergic to any foods.

Common intolerances include the foods listed as causing allergic reactions, in addition to those containing fructose, sulfites, lactose, histamine and gluten (known as non-coeliac gluten sensitivity). As well as the digestive discomfort that may signal food intolerance, other issues can include headaches, itching, migraine, wheezing, dermatitis, acne and anxiety. These can often be harder to pin down to a specific food trigger, however. Becoming increasingly more prevalent, at least 100m people worldwide are thought to be affected.

But to dig deeper into what is driving intolerances, we need to investigate so-called 'leaky gut' syndrome, as it's thought this may result in reduced tolerance to foods. Because sugar, antibiotics, dairy produce, gluten, stress, infection and poor sleep, as well as alcohol and caffeine may all have an impact on digestive health (as everyone is different and may or may not be affected). It's worth taking a look at your,

## 'Free from' doesn't always mean healthy

Don't just assume that because something is gluten free, it's healthier - if you read the back of the packets in the 'free from' aisle, you'll find that many manufactured products have extra sweeteners and fats added to improve their taste. A cake is still a cake, even if it is gluten-free (and therefore best reserved for a treat!). Cook from scratch where you can - look for gluten free grains such as buckwheat, quinoa, amaranth and teff. The Doves Farm Free range ([free-foods.co.uk](http://free-foods.co.uk)) includes healthier options including chickpea flour.



### Are you or your child affected?

- Keep a food and symptoms diary; note length of time after eating for the reaction. Seek medical attention urgently if breathing is affected.
- Try a guided elimination diet to identify intolerances. Because you will be cutting out food groups, it's important to work with a registered Nutritional Therapist who is a member of BANT and the regulatory body CNHC to ensure you are still eating a nutritious, well-balanced diet. They can offer food intolerance testing, or tests which check for overgrowth of yeasts, bacteria or parasites, and have an approach that's personalised, holistic, addresses underlying causes, and is underpinned by the latest science.
- Anti-inflammatory spices including ginger, curcumin and turmeric can all help to support digestive health, as can eating foods that fight inflammation. Try oily fish such as salmon, mackerel and sardines, leafy greens, olive oil, nuts and antioxidant-rich berries.
- Avoid fried and processed foods, refined carbohydrates as well as sugar and salt laden processed meals.
- Stress worsens digestion. Try eating slowly and chewing well.

or your child's, lifestyle to identify contributory factors. Replacing certain foods with others for a period and judicious use of supplements (all under the guidance of a Registered Nutritional Therapist) may help to support healthy digestive function and can also help to increase oral tolerance, meaning more foods can be enjoyed more often, without the unpleasant after-effects. ■

*NB: Nutritional Therapy is a complementary therapy and is not designed as a replacement for conventional medical care; it's essential to always check with your GP if you suspect food allergies or are concerned regarding reactions to food that you or child may have experienced.*

### FIND OUT MORE

Sally Parr from VivaVitae Nutrition trained as a Registered Nutritional Therapist (mBANT) and Registered Nutritionist (rCNHC) at the Institute for Optimum Nutrition. A Home Economist and freelance journalist who contributes regularly to the national press on the subject of food, nutrition and lifestyle, Sally also enjoys developing recipes and writing eBooks, giving talks on nutrition and running wellbeing workshops. You can find out more at [www.vivavitaenutrition.co.uk](http://www.vivavitaenutrition.co.uk)