

Food Allergies Versus Food Intolerance

Food reactions are common; however most occur due to food intolerance instead of a food allergy. Sometimes a food intolerance can cause many of the same symptoms of a food allergy and can often confuse people.

FOOD ALLERGY

A true food allergy can cause strong immune reactions and in some cases can be life-threatening. With a food allergy, even the smallest amount can cause immediate, severe reactions. Digestive signs and symptoms may include: nausea, diarrhea, and vomiting. If you do have a food allergy, you will need to avoid the offending food entirely. Other signs of allergic reaction include: tingling of the mouth, hives, swelling of the lips, face, tongue and the throat. A life-threatening allergic reaction known as anaphylaxis can cause issues with breathing and can cause dangerously low blood pressure.

FOOD INTOLERANCE

Food intolerances are less serious than a food allergy and are generally limited to digestive disruptions. If you do have a food intolerance, you may be able to eat small amounts of the offending food without having any issues. For instance, if you have a lactose intolerance, you may be able to drink lactose-free milk or take lactose enzyme pills that aid with digestion.

Common causes of food intolerance:

- **Absence of an enzyme** needed to fully digest a food. Lactose intolerance is a common example.
- **Irritable Bowel Syndrome:** This chronic condition can cause cramping, diarrhea and constipation.
- **Food poisoning:** Toxins such as bacteria in spoiled food can cause severe digestive symptoms.
- **Sensitivity to food additives:** For instance, sulfites used to preserve dried fruits, canned goods and wine can trigger asthma attacks in sensitive people.
- **Celiac disease:** Celiac disease has some features of a true food allergy because it does involve the immune system. However, symptoms are mostly gastrointestinal and people with celiac disease are not at risk for anaphylaxis. This chronic digestive issue is triggered by the consumption of gluten, a protein found in wheat and other grains.

ALLERGY EDUCATION RESOURCES

[The Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Network](#)

[Academy of Nutrition & Dietetics](#)

[American College of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology](#)



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COMMUNITY FOOD NETWORK