Chapter 35

Food Allergies

A food allergy is your body’s mistaken identity in action. Allergies usually occur when your immune system misidentifies a protein from a harmless food protein as a dangerous intruder and then triggers a defense response. These reactions can result in a wide range of symptoms that can sometimes be very mild to very severe. All allergies are signs of your body trying to protect itself from what it perceives as an external threat. What’s important to understand is that food allergies are not identical to food intolerances. Although food intolerances can cause considerable discomfort, such as bloating or digestive discomfort, allergies involve the immune system and can potentially be life-threatening.

Recent studies show that food allergies affect around 10.8% of American adults; women are more frequently affected than men. In fact, nearly 14% of women report having a food allergy compared to approximately 9% of men. It is believed this gender difference may be due to hormonal, immune and genetic factors that make women more susceptible to allergies throughout their lifespan. This is especially true during women’s hormonal transitions like pregnancy or menopause.[[1]](#endnote-1) Symptoms vary widely: fatigue, brain fog, anxiety, hives and gastrointestinal distress to severe reactions like anaphylaxis. Some reactions occur within minutes after consuming a particular food. Other reactions might appear hours later, which makes the connection between food and symptoms harder to detect.

It’s also important to note that food allergies can affect virtually every system of the body. Some women experience symptoms in their digestive tract, like bloating, gas, or constipation, while others notice neurological effects such as mood swings and irritability. The same food might even trigger different symptoms in different people or different symptoms in the same person over time. For example, someone might feel energized after eating bread in their twenties but later suffer from migraines or joint pain from that same wheat decades later. As we age, food allergies often evolve and adapt into our bodies and as we experience new or different hormonal, environmental and emotional stressors.

**Types of Food Allergies**

Many of the daily foods we enjoy daily--such as dairy, eggs, wheat, soy, peanuts, tree nuts, and shellfish--are also the ones most likely to cause allergic reactions. There are several forms of food allergies, and understanding their differences can help you identify allergic patterns in your own health.

The first and most diagnosed type is the fixed or **Immunoglobulin E** (IgE-mediated allergy. **IgE** is a type of antibody produced by your immune system that plays a central role in **immediate allergic reactions**. When you're allergic to a certain food, your immune system mistakenly identifies it as a harmful substance. The first time you're exposed to that allergen, your body creates **IgE antibodies** to counteract it. These IgE antibodies then attach themselves to immune cells called **mast cells** and **basophils** found in tissues like your skin, lungs, and gut. The next time you eat or come into contact with the food allergen, the IgE antibodies recognize it and trigger those immune cells to release **histamine** and other chemicals. These substances cause the classic allergy symptoms: swelling, itching, rashes, runny nose, wheezing, or even anaphylaxis in severe cases. For example, someone allergic to shellfish might experience hives, swelling, or even throat tightening shortly after a meal. These reactions are typically quick and unmistakable, and IgE-mediated allergies usually show up clearly on skin or blood tests.

Common foods that trigger IgE-mediated allergies include: tree nuts, peanuts, milk, eggs, soy, wheat, fish, shellfish, sesame and red meat.

Another allergy type is delayed or non-IgE-mediated allergy; these allergies are also sometimes referred to as cyclic food allergy. These allergies’ symptoms may not occur immediately after eating but emerge hours or even days later. Reactions tend to affect the skin or gastrointestinal system, which can lead to eczema, bloating, diarrhea, or constipation. Because these symptoms are more subtle and slower to appear, they are harder to trace back to a specific food. Interestingly, some people can tolerate the allergenic food when they eat it only occasionally. However, when the food consumed too frequently the body begins to react. Consequently, many people are unaware that their chronic low-grade symptoms are actually allergic in nature.

Another type that is more often witnessed in women is an addictive allergy. In these cases, the person feels a deep craving for the very food that is causing harm. Eating it may provide temporary relief—for example it might lessen anxiety or reduce fatigue--but it eventually worsens symptoms over time. This cycle creates a biochemical dependence that can completely disguise the allergy. For instance, someone who drinks milk every morning may attribute their low energy or frequent colds to other factors and never suspect that dairy is the underlying cause. Over time, the allergy can also change form. A child who breaks out in hives after milk might stop having obvious reactions later in life but develop more chronic conditions like headaches, joint pain or mood fluctuations as the immune system continues to respond in subtler ways.

Food allergies, especially when hidden or masked, tend to involve the very foods we consume the most. In the U.S., dairy, wheat, corn, nuts and eggs are common triggers. The overconsumption of processed foods that contain corn syrup, corn starch, fructose, dairy derivatives, and preservatives contributes to the rpaid increase in today’s food sensitivities.

**Causes**

One of the most common underlying causes of food allergies is impaired digestion. Our digestive system relies on enzymes and stomach acid to break down food proteins into smaller components. When this process is hindered or incomplete due to low stomach acid, enzyme deficiencies, or poor gut health, larger protein molecules pass through the intestinal lining and enter our bloodstream. When the immune system, recognizes these undigested proteins as foreign invaders, it mounts an inflammatory response. This response then leads to a cascade of symptoms throughout the body from skin rashes to brain fog to painful digestion.

In addition to digestion, environmental and emotional stress contributes to the development of food allergies. Our bodies are constantly being exposed to chemical pollutants in the air, water and food supply; these toxins include pesticides, plastics, heavy metals and synthetic chemicals used in food processing. Many women unknowing ingest antibiotic residues, synthetic hormones, and artificial dyes and preservatives through packaged foods and non-organic meats. These substances not only strain the liver and our body’s natural detoxification mechanisms but can also confuse and over-stimulate the immune system. Emotional stress, grief, chronic fatigue, poor sleep, etc. further lower the body’s ability to manage these toxic exposures and make allergic responses more likely.

For some individuals genetics may play a crucial role. A child born to two allergic parents has about a 75 percent chance of developing some type of allergy. If only one parent is allergic, the chance remains around 50 percent. However, the type of allergy isn’t necessarily inherited. A mother might be allergic to citrus fruits, while her child develops a peanut allergy. Allergic tendencies often run in families, even if the specific allergens differ.

A phenomenon known as “allergic march” describes how food allergies can change over time. For example, an allergy may begin as eczema or asthma in childhood and then transition to food intolerance, migraines, or joint pain in adulthood. Many people assume they have “outgrown” a childhood allergy; however, in reality the symptom has merely changed how it expresses itself. A child who reacted to milk with colic may as an adult feel chronically tired or emotionally drained without realizing it is the same allergen being activated.

Impairment of the gut barrier, commonly referred to as “leaky gut”, is a potential contributor to food allergies and sensitivities. The gut lining is composed of tightly bound cells that regulates what substances pass into the bloodstream. When these tight junctions between these cells become compromised, undigested food particles, toxins, and bacterial fragments can enter the circulating blood and prompt immune activation. This immune response can then manifest as food sensitivities or contribute to the development of food allergies.

Several studies confirm that alterations in the microbiome’s composition are linked to food allergies. For instance, children with food allergies have a lower abundance of Clostridia and Firmicutes, which support mucosal health and regulate immune tolerance.[[2]](#endnote-2) Experiments show that restoring healthy microbial gut organisms protects against allergic sensitization by increasing regulatory T cells necessary to differentiate between harmful invaders and benign food proteins.[[3]](#endnote-3)

There is emerging but still limited evidence to suggest a potential link between exposure to electromagnetic fields (EMFs)--such as those emitted by mobile phones, Wi-Fi routers, and other wireless devices--and an increase in allergic reactions and food sensitivities. One theory is that EMFs can disrupt the regulation of the immune system and thereby alter the gut microbiota that contributes to possible immune responses to food antigens. A study shows that radiofrequency radiation can modulate immune functions, depending on exposure levels, and alter lymphocytes and mast cells, which are directly involved in allergic responses.[[4]](#endnote-4) Another compelling study explored how chronic low-level EMF exposure contributes to increased allergic and inflammatory conditions. This paper provides biological plausibility by linking EMF exposure to histamine-related tissue responses as a central mediator in allergic reactions.[[5]](#endnote-5) Although not yet conclusive, these findings raise important questions about modern environmental exposures and their potential role in rising allergic conditions.

**Diagnosis**

During the past decade, testing for food allergies has evolved significantly. Older traditional methods like skin prick tests and IgE blood tests remain useful for detecting IgE-mediated allergic reactions. These tests are particularly good for identifying life-threatening allergies like peanuts or shellfish. Today more advanced tests can analyze specific components within foods themselves to predict the severity of allergic reactions more accurately.

For delayed or non-IgE allergies, conventional tests are often not helpful. In these cases, elimination diets are still among the most effective tools. This approach involves removing suspected foods from your diet for a period of time--usually around two weeks--and then reintroducing them one by one while monitoring for unusual reactions and symptoms.[[6]](#endnote-6) Many women gain control over their food sensitivities with this process. It is especially effective when they keep a detailed food and symptom journal.

Other forms of testing include atopy patch tests that can detect delayed skin reactions. A method known as oral food challenges is considered the gold standard in diagnosing true food allergies. These tests have to be done under medical supervision because reactions can sometimes be severe. Controversial tests like IgG antibody panels and applied kinesiology are still used in some integrative practices, however, their accuracy and reliability are debated in the medical literature.

At-home strategies like keeping a four-day rotation diet, whereby no food is eaten more than once every four days, may help uncover hidden sensitivities. This method not only helps identify food culprits but can also prevent new sensitivities from developing due to overexposure. Although it requires planning and commitment, many women report feeling clearer, more energized, and more emotionally balanced after just a few weeks on such a plan.[[7]](#endnote-7)

Another test that can be performed at home is the Coca Pulse test. First find your normal pulse range by taking it every two hours. Then take it again at specific, regular intervals after eating the suspected allergen. If your pulse rises more than ten points, the food eaten last is suspect. The pulse is rising as a reaction to increased adrenaline in your system. The adrenaline may be released in reaction to an allergy. This is not a fool-proof method, but it can provide you with a possible target for further diagnostic confirmation.

Living with food allergies or sensitivities can feel confusing, isolating, and overwhelming. But it’s also an opportunity to reconnect with your body’s deep intelligence. Our symptoms, even when they seem inconvenient or disruptive, are messengers. They are your body’s way of saying: "Something isn’t working. Please listen."

By exploring your symptoms with curiosity and compassion, keeping a journal, and experimenting with food rotation or elimination, you can uncover patterns and restore balance. Women are especially attuned to the rhythms of the body and the subtle shifts that signal deeper changes. Trust this intuition. The journey may be gradual, but clarity comes—one symptom, one food, one choice at a time.

**NATURAL TREATMENTS**

**Sublingual Immunotherapy**

Sublingual immunotherapy (SLIT) or low-dose allergen immunotherapy--formally known as neutralizing-dose therapy--is an evolving method for treating multiple food and environmental allergies, especially when total avoidance is impractical. This therapy involves identifying the smallest dose of an allergen that causes a reaction and then using a diluted amount under the tongue to help the immune system gradually tolerate the substance. While conventional allergy shots have long been used for respiratory allergies, SLIT is gaining traction because it's less invasive and can be administered at home. A systematic review found that SLIT is effective in reducing symptoms of certain food allergies, particularly peanuts and tree nuts.[[8]](#endnote-8) Overall, this therapy shows promise but should always be done under medical supervision and especially for severe food allergies.

**Diet**

One of the most effective ways to manage food allergies and sensitivities is through dietary intervention, and particularly the elimination of trigger foods. For women with immune-mediated conditions such as food allergies or celiac disease, strict avoidance is critical because even small exposures can result in serious reactions and harm. Food allergen cross-reactivity, where structurally similar foods provoke an immune response, also requires careful dietary consideration. On the other hand, those with non-immune food intolerances, such as lactose intolerance, may tolerate small amounts of the offending food, and especially when consumed with other foods or in fermented forms.

However, eliminating key food groups can create nutritional deficiencies. For example, removing dairy will reduce calcium, vitamin D and B12 intake that are vital for bone and nerve health. Therefore, dietary planning must ensure that all essential nutrients are obtained either through other food sources or with supplementation. Furthermore, the condition of the gut itself plays a major role in food reactions. A diverse, balanced diet rich in whole foods will help reduce systemic inflammation and support a healthy gut microbiome. Sustaining healthy gut flora will itself reduce the severity or frequency of allergic responses. Probiotic and fermented foods may offer additional digestive support, particularly in easing lactose intolerance or restoring gut microbial balance.

When managing food allergies, thee are certain vitamins, minerals, and plant compounds that stand out for their ability to calm the body’s immune reactivity, reduce inflammation, and strengthen the gut lining. These nutrients offer a safe and empowering way for women to support their health from the inside out.

**Nutrients**

**Probiotics,** particularly strains like *Lactobacillus rhamnosus GG* (LGG) and *Bifidobacterium longum*, help restore balance in the gut microbiome and support the immune system to strengthen tolerance to food allergens. For women, and especially mothers, this is very important; maternal intake of probiotics during pregnancy and breastfeeding has been shown to protect infants at high risk for food allergies. In one study, supplementation with *B. breve* and *L. casei* strains modulated gut inflammation and reduced IgE responses in food sensitized children.[[9]](#endnote-9)

**Vitamin D** deficiency has been linked to increased risk of food allergies. This is especially the case in children, however, during pregnancy women should ensure they have adequate vitamin D to reduce the chances of their child developing food sensitivities. For example, a prospective cohort study showed that low maternal vitamin D levels during pregnancy were associated with an increased risk of egg and peanut allergy in infants.[[10]](#endnote-10)

**Vitamin C** has natural antihistamine effects that can make food allergic responses less intense. Although most studies have focused on asthma or respiratory allergies, its impact on food allergies is promising due to its role in reducing histamine production and modulating inflammation. In one study, daily vitamin C intake of 2 grams decreased allergy-related lung inflammation.[[11]](#endnote-11) Another study found low vitamin C levels were associated with increased allergic sensitivity.[[12]](#endnote-12) For women managing histamine-related food sensitivity symptoms like flushing or itching, vitamin C may be a simple and safe solution.

**Omega-3 fatty acids** reduce inflammatory mediators involved in allergic responses. A systematic review supports their use in modulating immune responses related to food allergens.[[13]](#endnote-13) In addition, for pregnant women, omega-3 supplementation may lower the risk of their child developing food allergies. Doses in studies typically range from 1,000–3,000 mg of combined EPA/DHA per day.

**Quercetin** acts as a natural antihistamine by stabilizing mast cells and preventing the release of histamines responsible for many allergy symptoms. Therefore it is especially helpful for women experiencing histamine-related food allergies or sensitivities. A review found that quercetin not only reduces histamine but also lowers inflammatory cytokines involved in allergic reactions.[[14]](#endnote-14) Quercetin supplements are best taken with vitamin C for synergistic effects. Many women report fewer allergic flare-ups and improved resilience during allergy seasons with consistent quercetin use.

**Spirulina**, a blue-green algae, has clinical benefits in modulating allergic reactions. In one trial, 2,000 mg/day of spirulina improved allergy symptoms and reduced interleukin-4, a key inflammatory molecule in food allergies and IgE elevation.[[15]](#endnote-15) Another study found it decreased allergy syndrome and food-induced histamine reaction symptoms such as nasal congestion, itching, and sneezing.

**Butterbur** is a botanical extract traditionally used for allergic rhinitis; however, newer research suggests its anti-inflammatory effects help manage certain food-triggered symptoms. It stabilizes mast cells and reduces leukotrienes that are associated with where food sensitivities overlap with histamine-related responses. Butterbur extract is also as effective as antihistamine drugs for reducing allergy symptoms without common sedation drug adverse effects.[[16]](#endnote-16)

**Zinc** is essential for the immune system for maintaining the integrity of the gut barrier. Zinc deficiency increases the intestine’s permeability thereby allowing food particles to cross into the bloodstream and provoke immune reactions. For women, especially during pregnancy or under stress, zinc supplementation may help support immune tolerance to foods. Typical therapeutic doses range from 15–30 mg daily.[[17]](#endnote-17)

**L-Glutamine** is an amino acid critical for gut health and is often recommended in functional medicine to repair the intestinal lining. For women with food sensitivities linked to intestinal permeability, glutamine may inhibit the immune system’s exposure to undigested proteins and food antigens. A randomized controlled trial in humans with leaky gut showed that 15 g of oral glutamine per day significantly improved intestinal barrier function and reduced food-related symptoms.[[18]](#endnote-18) It is also well tolerated and often used in nutritional protocols addressing bloating, cramps, and multiple food sensitivities.

**Stress Management**

Since chronic stress lowers the body’s immune resilience, it can also increase our vulnerability to food allergies and worsen allergic reactions. Mind-body practices such as mindfulness meditation, yoga, tai chi, and deep breathing have been shown to reduce inflammation and positively influence immune regulation. A review of over 40 studies confirmed that mindfulness-based stress reduction practices reduce inflammatory cytokines and lessen allergy symptoms; it was even more effective in allergic conditions that involve the gut-brain axis.[[19]](#endnote-19) These practices also improve digestion. Women who experience food-related fatigue, mood swings or chronic allergic symptoms often find substantial relief by incorporating regular stress management into their daily healing routines.

**Food Allergies and Mental Health**

The link between food allergies and mental health has been acknowledged in clinical settings. Research shows that inflammatory responses caused by food allergies can affect the brain and lead to psychological symptoms such as anxiety, depression, mood swings, and in some cases, symptoms that mimic psychiatric disorders. One study found a significant association between non-celiac gluten sensitivity and depressive symptoms, which suggests that food intolerance can affect mood through neuroimmunological pathways.[[20]](#endnote-20) Moreover, histamine release from food reactions can trigger anxiety and agitation in people who are especially sensitive. Although not every mental health issue is allergy-related, it’s important for women who experience unexplainable mood disturbances to explore whether food sensitivities might be interfering with their emotional well-being.

**Food Allergies and Headaches**

In women, migraines and chronic headaches are commonly linked to food allergies. Despite conventional medications to manage headaches, many women find lasting relief by identifying and eliminating food triggers. The most frequent culprits include chocolate, dairy, gluten, aged cheese, red and white wines, and processed meats; all of these foods contain compounds like tyramine or histamine that can provoke vascular changes in the brain. Some fermented food products, including aged-cheese and red wine, contain tyramine. One large study found that eliminating trigger foods led to a 93% reduction in migraine frequency among diagnosed sufferers.[[21]](#endnote-21) As sated above, delayed allergic responses often make food triggers difficult to identify. Headaches due to hidden food or chemical sensitivities can often be treated simply by eliminating the allergy, once it has been identified, with an elimination or rotation diet. Women who suffer from recurring migraines should also consider working with a clinician trained in nutritional immunology or environmental medicine.

**Food Allergies and Gut Health**

Imbalances involving unhealthy gut bacteria can have a foundational role in allergic disease. One clinical trial found that *Lactobacillus rhamnosus GG*, a widely studied probiotic strain, significantly reduced eczema and food allergy symptoms in children and adults when taken regularly.[[22]](#endnote-22) Emerging research supports the idea that improving gut microbiota through probiotics and prebiotic-rich foods—such as asparagus, garlic, onions, and bananas-- modulates immune responses and calm allergic tendencies in the body. In addition, a fiber-rich diet may reduce susceptibility to food allergies.

**Food Allergies and Fatigue**

As so many women know, chronic fatigue can be a deeply frustrating symptom. It is even more frustrating when lab results appear normal. Known as allergic tension-fatigue syndrome, this condition can sometimes be caused by persistent low-grade inflammation from food reactions that are further compounded by adrenal stress and blood sugar instability. Research shows that food-induced inflammation affects the cells’ mitochondrial function thereby reducing cellular energy and ultimately leading to chronic fatigue. If a woman finds herself frequently relying on sugar, caffeine, or stimulants to get through the day, it may be worth exploring underlying food sensitivities. Identifying culprit allergens and adopting an anti-inflammatory diet can often restore energy and reduce the need for artificial pharmaceutical energy boosts.

**Food Allergies and Obesity**

Many obese women believe that they are overweight due to heredity, because they have a thyroid or metabolic problem, or because they simply eat too much. They may blame it on a lack of self-control, or become convinced that they have psychological problems. However, some experts believe that roughly two out of three obese individuals suffer from some form of allergy. Although obesity is influenced by many factors, food sensitivities can have a hidden role for some women. Allergic cravings often lead to compulsive eating. The particularly dangerous foods are high-calorie allergenic like sugar, dairy and wheat. There’s also evidence that chemical toxins stored in fat tissue can aggravate immune dysfunction and contribute to inflammation.[[23]](#endnote-23) As fat breaks down during weight loss, stored allergens and toxins re-enter the body’s circulation, and temporarily worsen symptoms and trigger a food craving. Thus, detoxification support, including liver-nourishing foods and sufficient hydration, can be an effective weight loss strategy for allergic individuals. A personalized elimination diet will support both immune balance and healthy metabolism.

**Food Allergies and Arthritis**

Emerging research suggests that a significant portion of autoimmune and inflammatory arthritis cases may be triggered or worsened by food allergies. It is well known that certain foods can provoke systemic inflammation and contribute to joint pain and stiffness. One groundbreaking study found that rheumatoid arthritis patients who are placed on a gluten-free vegan diet experienced significant improvement in their symptoms.[[24]](#endnote-24) The inflammatory response caused by food allergens may sometimes show up directly in the joints. For women with chronic joint pain, exploring food triggers with an elimination diet may bring dramatic improvement and enhance mobility. Dr. Marshall Mandell successfully treated hundreds of arthritis patients by putting them on a five-day distilled-water fast and then allowing their usual foods, one at a time, back into their diet. If a food causes the arthritis symptoms, the symptoms will return when it is reintroduced into the diet and should be permanently eliminated.

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