

Life is a
Bag of Revels

**A Rough Guide to
Food Intolerances**

By Wendy Churchill

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Introduction

Headaches, stomach, digestion, fatigue or joint problems that won't go away - and that doctors can't solve?

Wondering whether your asthma, acne, ulcers or rheumatoid arthritis could be caused by a food intolerance?

Intrigued as to whether emotional symptoms could be caused by physical causes?

Whatever the reason for your interest in food intolerance, there is a high chance that what you're about to discover could turn out to be life-changing. Thousands of people have already found blissful relief from a whole array of chronic and unexplained problems that had defeated both them and leagues of doctors - simply by making small changes to their diets.

That is not to say, however, that the solution is necessarily going to be instant and easy. The whole area of food intolerance is still a very uncharted

ground and 100% solutions are rarely instant. The process of working out whether or not your symptoms may be caused by an intolerance to food - and which foods in particular - does take a certain amount of work, patience, dedication and time. It is very likely, however, that what you find out on the journey will be very valuable to both your health and your wellbeing, and also to the health of your family members.

Definitions of what a 'food intolerance' is or how they come about are still somewhat fuzzy and will vary depending on the source of information you're reading. Some sources at one end of the spectrum will offer anecdotal information about food intolerances as if it were fact. Sources at the other end of the spectrum will almost dismiss food intolerances altogether.

The information given in this booklet is presented with the aim of offering the simplest and most helpful initial guidance to those who believe they

may be suffering - rather than searching for the most accurate scientific content.

We must act like detectives and hunt out the often complex causes of our health imperfections and symptoms

The information should not therefore be taken as the 'truth' but as a resource to help you find out the truth about your own body. More and more, it is now being recognized that there is not always just one simple cure for many kinds of illness. While our lives have been transformed by highly effective medicines like penicillin - and by effective surgery such as heart surgery and hip operations - we cannot just rely on our doctors to solve all of our health problems for us.

One day perhaps we may be able to. In the meantime, each of us is responsible for doing 'detective' work ourselves - to try and work out what are the complex problems and weakspots in our bodies (or our interactions with our environment) that are causing us to suffer the symptoms we can't

get rid of.

Doing so, however, can be a very costly process. The aim of this booklet is to offer you a concise and easy way of helping you find things out about your body for yourself. A rough-and-ready map to help you find your way across some very uncharted - but potentially life-changing ground.

The main three areas we will be looking at in this booklet are:

What exactly is a food intolerance? What are the main symptoms? Which foods are most likely to cause it?

How can I find out whether it is the (or a) cause of my symptoms? Are expensive tests worth the money? How do I go about doing an elimination diet?

What other ways are there of curing myself of an intolerance apart from just avoiding the foods I'm sensitive to? Are there supplements I can take, for example, to strengthen my immunity? If inadequate digestion is the problem then what can I do to improve it?

What exactly is a food intolerance? How does it differ from an allergy? What are the symptoms? What are the causes?

While some sources believe that as much as 45% of the population may suffer from a food intolerance of some description, food allergies affect only around 2% of the population.

Generally speaking, an allergy involves a strong reaction from the immune system against a substance. Reactions can sometimes be very violent and sometimes even life threatening. These include swelling of the lips, throat mouth or tongue, sudden skin rashes, vomiting, sudden and extreme problems with breathing, collapse, or anaphylactic shock. If a classical food allergy is suspected then you should consult your GP immediately.

A 'food intolerance' meanwhile, can include any adverse reaction to food - which in some text books includes everything from a mild reaction to a serious

allergy. While a food allergy involves a fast reaction, a food intolerance is generally something that will gradually get worse over time - often over months or even years.

It is possible that you may have an intolerance to just one food - but more likely that you have an intolerance to between two and five. For some unlucky people the figure is much higher. Generally, the longer you have been suffering, the higher it's likely to be.

As to what exactly causes a food intolerance, there are as yet no definitive answers. There are various theories put forward that may (or may not) explain what goes on - and the most likely answer is that a number of these are all true in some cases. The most common theory, however, is that an intolerance

is caused by the the inability to completely break down food into absorbable components due to lack or insufficient amounts of digestive enzymes. A slightly different (but somewhat vague) idea is that the body's system (the immune system perhaps in some cases) seems to develop a sensitivity to foods that we eat a lot of. Having to deal with digesting it so much, perhaps, reduces its ability to do so.

Perhaps a better way of looking at it rather than worrying about the exact causes, is that it can be partly a problem of immunity (although possibly not in all cases), partly a problem of digestion, as well as a problem of inflammation. It is for this reason that we will be looking later at ways in which you can strengthen your body's health in these three areas in order to improve your overall health and help combat intolerances.

The main symptoms of food intolerance include bloating, abdominal pains, diarrhea, headache and migraine, fatigue, depression or anxiety, aching muscles or joints, rheumatoid arthritis, problems with your skin, mouth ulcers, inability to lose weight, nausea and stomach ulcers and a whole range of other digestive problems.

This list, however, is far from exhaustive and it is perhaps more accurate to say that if you suffer from any symptom or combination of symptoms that your doctor has been unable to fix, it is most CERTAINLY worth investigating whether a food

intolerance could be the cause of it.

Food intolerance has now been linked to dozens of different symptoms and even **serious conditions such as asthma, eczema, crohn's disease, depression, migraines and irritable bowel syndrome**. Yet it is still unlikely that your doctor will even mention the possibility of a food intolerance to you when you present with your problem.

The 'top culprit' food list includes milk, wheat, eggs, shellfish, oranges, coffee, alcohol, nuts, peanuts, yeast and additives... and any foods that you find yourself particularly craving... You can, however, have an intolerance to almost any food. While some people say that rice is on the 'safe' list, for example, in countries where rice is the staple, an intolerance to rice is actually likely. The top two 'safe foods' are considered to be lamb and pear!

Most of the population would in fact benefit from reducing the amount they consume of at least some of the list

Some people believe that milk or 'lactose' intolerance actually effects more people than it doesn't as adults are not intended to consume milk. Indeed, while some people would not consider that they 'suffer' from a food intolerance as such, they may certainly feel the benefits of reducing their consumption of a number of items on the list

How can I find out whether or not I have a food intolerance?

The only definite way of finding out whether you have a food intolerance is by following a very strict elimination diet - which we will discuss in more detail below.

While your doctor can offer you patch tests to see whether you have an allergic reaction to a certain food, there is no instant 'test' that can give you definite results about whether or not you have an intolerance. If you search on the internet you will certainly find a

lot of companies offering a variety of tests for a range of different prices, the highest I've seen coming in at £250 and sounding very convincing. While some of these tests may perhaps give results that could be useful, there is no definite proof that any of them are anywhere near as scientific or conclusive as they claim. The results may be right - but then again they may not.

Indeed, the fact that you are reading this report today may be a more accurate indicator that you

have a food intolerance, than taking any test!

Some initial detective work

If you suspect that food intolerance may be a problem for you but you're not quite ready to throw yourself into the deep end with a full elimination diet, then you may prefer to try a few mini-tests first. These small tests alone may be enough to solve your problem sufficiently alone. Alternatively, they may offer enough of a breakthrough to encourage you to take the elimination diet one step further.

Start, for example, by going entirely without any dairy products for a week or two then eat it a lot for a whole day and compare what happens. Next (even if that does work and you think you've found the answer), move onto wheat - going without all foods that contain it (including bread, pasta, biscuits, pastry and beer). After that, you can move on to other offenders on the 'top culprit' list including eggs, shellfish, oranges, sugar coffee, alcohol, nuts, peanuts, yeast and additives... and any foods that you find yourself particularly craving...

Another option is to keep a food diary for a week. You may find, for example, that your headaches seem to occur when you eat foods high in additives... that your joint pain is less on days when you don't eat potatoes... or that your digestive problems ease up on days when you don't eat that midday sandwich...

Some important factors to consider with this initial detective work are:

- If you go without a culprit food, you may actually feel worse initially. Your symptoms, however, should begin to feel much better by the end of the first week - giving you inspiration to try it for the next week too.
- You may experience great results with this little effort in the first few weeks - but then find that your symptoms start returning again (and your enthusiasm and will power begin to wane because of it). This may then be the time to move onto a more serious elimination diet to find out exactly which foods you are intolerant of - because chances are, unfortunately, that there will be several. It may also be an indicator that the cause of your symptoms could actually be fully or partially emotional.

- Food intolerances can work in conjunction - or even be caused or worsened by - emotional, physical or environmental influences such as stress, illness, an impaired immune system, inadequate nutrition, nutritional deficiencies - including deficiencies caused by over-consumption of alcohol, sugar and or caffeinated drinks, environmental pollution, toxic overload, smoking and so on...
- Some people may find that initially they have a great relief from their symptoms but that over time the problem(s) just return - despite the fact that they are strictly staying off the food. One thing to consider in this case is that what the experiment actually achieved was a spurt of hope and therefore a change in the emotional makeup of the person. This could have temporarily relieved physical symptoms caused by emotional issues. Suppressed anger, stress, or an inability to deal with issues from the past are just two examples.
- A food intolerance is not a death sentence for your ability to ever eat chocolate, spaghetti carbonara or a ham sandwich again. Some people find that if they stay off culprit foods for a few months then they are able to tolerate them again - normally in reduced quantities but sometimes as before. For other people this process may take longer.

So what is an elimination diet?

An elimination diet is not really a 'diet' at all - but a diagnostic test. This is not a way of solving your problems - but of finding out what the sources of your problems might be.

Basically, it involves eliminating all foods that could possibly be causing you a problem and living on a diet of the remaining, 'allowed' foods for two or three weeks or until you feel better - depending on which is sooner. This is called the 'exclusion' phase of the diet. After that, you then reintroduce all the potential offenders, one at a time, for one week each. This is what is known as the 'reintroduction' phase.

Exactly how this is carried will vary on who you consult, how dedicated you are, the kind of person you are, and how serious are your symptoms. Some specialists, for example, recommend that you start by going on a healthy diet for at least a month

before you even start exclusion. This involves cutting out tea, coffee, fizzy drinks, coca cola, anything sweet, alcohol, all additives, take-away and fast foods and... continental sausages and very ripe cheeses (because they are a rich source of histamine).

There is also, of course, the question of how many foods you allow yourself in the exclusion phase. This may include as little as just lamb and pears. It could allow more than this to include all vegetables, vegetable oil, rice and beans. Or that list may differ as I have seen some that include potatoes - even though potatoes are sometimes a problem. It should certainly exclude all the foods and drinks mentioned above, along with all additives, alcohol and sugar.

In fact, a bare minimum exclusion diet might exclude all the items mentioned in the healthy diet above, plus the most common offenders which include: milk, wheat, eggs, shellfish, oranges, coffee, alcohol, nuts, peanuts, yeast and additives. Plus any medication that you do not need to take such as painkillers.

In the reintroduction phase, introduce one item at a time. Eat a normal size portion of it for lunch and dinner. Foods can take up to two or even three days to have an effect and you should include them in your diet for three consecutive days before ruling them out as a problem and allowing them in.

Some specialists suggest that you start with foods that are less likely to be offenders first - for example, foods that you do not eat very often. There is then

the question of what you should and shouldn't introduce together. Milk and cheese should be tested separately, for example.

Other foods to test at reintroduction stage include citrus fruit, yeast, mushrooms, potatoes, oats, eggs, beef, chicken and peanuts. And of course the different kinds of alcohols (red wine, white wine, beer, spirits) and caffeinated drinks (tea, coffee, cocoa).

A few further points to consider:

- Rather than a food itself, you may actually be intolerant of a naturally occurring chemical found in that food. Salicylate, for example, is found in many herbs, fruit and vegetables.
- In a complex food, it is probably not the food itself you are reacting to but one of the ingredients. If you find that you have a problem with bread, for example, it may be that you are reacting to the wheat, preservatives, yeast, or even the bleaching agents.

You are now probably beginning to get an idea of quite how much of a minefield the exclusion diet is - and therefore why it is worthwhile doing a serious amount of thought and research before you begin. Setbacks are not completely avoidable but it is probably safe to say that the better you plan and the more dedicated you are, the better chance you have of succeeding.

What other ways are there of helping myself deal with an intolerance apart from just avoiding the foods I'm sensitive to?

As we mentioned briefly earlier, there are three main areas to consider when it comes to strengthening your body's natural resistance to food intolerance. Or, to put it another way, there are three things that could be going wrong in your body if you are susceptible - all of which are crucial areas to concentrate on in order to maintain resistance to all ill health problems:

- Your digestion
- Your immunity
- Inflammation

Creating a super-strong digestive system

Taking steps to improve your digestion and diet is your first step towards rebuilding your body's health. People who suffer from food intolerances often have an underlying digestive imbalance and suffer from digestive problems.

One particular problem that some people with suspected food intolerances might be suffering from is the very graphically named Leaky Gut Syndrome. At the bottom of a lot of unexplained symptoms that people suffer from today, **Leaky Gut Syndrome** basically involves poor absorption of food in the intestinal tract due to increased intestinal permeability. This can lead to chronic inflammation, bowel conditions, skin conditions, fatigue and indeed, food intolerances.

Fortunately, however, there is a lot you can do to heal imbalances and create positive digestive health. In fact, by simply working on healing and nurturing your poor digestive system alone, you could find that many of the mysterious symptoms you suffer slowly melt away... and you feel more energetic, more alive and more positively healthy than you have in years.

On a day to day basis, it is important to eat as many kinds of good foods as possible and to decrease the amount of 'bad' foods and drinks you ask your stomach to deal with. Try not to allow your diet to be too heavy on dairy foods, too heavy on wheat-based products, or too heavy on sugar. Everything in moderation - and the more things in moderation as possible. You should also be careful not to overload your digestive system at mealtimes with too much food - and to avoid caffeinated drinks at the same time as you eat.

Of all the substances that you can use to aid your digestion, top of the list has to be acidophilus. This is an essential good bacteria of the stomach that is important both to improve absorption and help heal damage. It is found in sauerkraut, cottage cheese, miso and especially yoghurt. When buying yoghurts, make sure that the ingredients lists live cultures and preferably opt for a good organic.

Another very effective substance you should consider for improved digestive health is FOS - fructooligosaccharides. Contained in jerusalem artichokes, garlic and bananas, this powerful phytonutrient both detoxifies the digestive system

and supports the growth of good bacteria while interfering with the growth of harmful bacteria.

Finally, there are a number of quietly remarkable healing herbs that can be highly effective in assisting the digestive system. These include Cat's Claw, gnetian root, dandelion root and ginger.. Cat's Claw in particular is a great cleanser of the intestinal tract and supports the whole digestive system.

So, for a healthy digestive system: Lighten the load that your system has to deal with. Increase the amount of highly nutritious foods that you give it. Reduce the amount of substances that are doing it damage, including sugar, refined carbohydrates, processed fats and caffeine.

The importance of a strong immune system

It is not always easy to know to what extent - if at all - an immune reaction is involved with food intolerance. As a strong immune system is the backbone of good health, however, working on this area is essential for us all.

The main recipe for a strong immune system is a healthy lifestyle and a healthy state of mental and emotional health. If you feel that your lifestyle is not as healthy as it could be therefore, it may help to start by writing a list of areas where you feel improvement could be made, with some ideas for small steps you could slowly start taking in order to improve them.

On top of a healthy lifestyle, there are also a number of herbs you can take to help give your system some extra support and stimulus. The three most consistently recommended herbs for immunity strengthening are garlic, astragalus and echinacea.

Another substance which has more recently come on the scene and with which some people are now reporting remarkable results is 'Transfer Factors'. Transfer Factors are tiny molecules found in colostrum (the first milk that a mother makes when breastfeeding a new offspring) which provide "immune knowledge" from a mother's immune system to her baby.

Reduce your body's inflammation

Inflammation is now increasingly being seen as a

culprit behind many problems and diseases. Whenever the body is injured, irritated or infected, 'inflammation' is the basic way in which it reacts to it. The key features of inflammation are redness, warmth, swelling and pain and these all serve their purpose when and for as long as they are necessary. What can happen, however, is that factors such as poor dietary choices or food intolerances can over-stimulate the immune system and cause a constant state of inflammation. It also seems that in some immune-related conditions, the problem is that the immune system just doesn't seem to be able to turn itself off.

For many people who suffer from symptoms related to food intolerance, taking steroids can often be highly effective in switching off their symptoms. But taking steroids on an ongoing basis, of course, can also be detrimental to the health and is not really the option many of us would want to take.

So what is the alternative?

Once again, of course, the main answer is diet. Not only is a healthy diet full of plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables essential, but there are a number of foods you can eat in particular for their anti-inflammatory properties.

Of all the nutrients, omega-3 fatty acids is the most important one to add to your diet. It has great anti-inflammatory properties but is very commonly lacking in most people's diet. Eat plenty of wild salmon, sardines, anchovies and shellfish. Nuts and seeds and especially flax seed and walnuts are also great sources. For a low-cost supplement, cod liver oil tablets are a good option.

Once again, sugar and refined carbohydrates come in as foods that can add to or cause increased inflammation. Don't over-eat on sugar or wheat

products. And beware of overloading your system with too many additives.

The main anti-inflammatory nutrients are folic acid and other B vitamins, essential fatty acids and vitamin D. It may therefore be a good idea to take a good multivitamin supplement as part of your healthy diet.

Bioflavonoids are also known for their strong anti-inflammatory effect and can be found in citrus fruits, tea - and even cocoa and wine. The best bioflavonoids to take in supplement form are Pycnogenol, quercetin and rutin.

Last but not at all least there are three main herbs that you can take for their strong anti-inflammatory effect:

Boswellia. This herb has been used as an anti-inflammatory in Ayurvedic medicine for centuries. Today, scientists studying extracts of boswellia are reporting that it can switch off key cell signalers and pro-inflammatory mediators known as cytokines.

Ginger has now been found to suppress the synthesis of pro-inflammatory molecules called prostaglandins and can have a similar effect as NSAIDs. It has also been shown to actually help inhibit chronic inflammation.

Turmeric is another spice used as an anti-inflammatory in Indian Ayurvedic medicine. It's strong anti-inflammatory effects have now been validated by modern scientific methods and its effects are compared to (although not the same as) COX-2 inhibitors used in prescription anti-inflammatories.

And finally, one of the fastest ways to reduce inflammation is to stop smoking and using stimulants.

Conclusion

Treat your body like a prize-winning plant

In some ways finding out that you have a problem with food intolerance might not be the best news you could hear. There aren't many of us who don't go to the doctors hoping that they will simply give us some pills that will make the problem go away. So discovering that considerable effort and change might be needed on our own part may not exactly be the perfect solution we were after.

Our medical system as it stands, however, does concentrate far too heavily on magic pill answers. Which is why so many people are constantly disappointed that their doctors can do so little to help them.

Our bodies - like any other organism - are very delicate systems, reliant on many factors to keep them in health and balance.

You only have to think about the variations of

conditions involved with growing healthy strong vegetables, for example, to remember how easy it can be for things to go wrong. Gardeners talk of different plants needing different soil, for example. Some will benefit from a hot dry summer, others prefer a cool and wet one. And the most important factor of all, of course, is the nutrient content available for the plants in the soil.

If we were to treat our bodies as if we were trying to grow a prize-winning tomato plant, few of us would subject it to the poor conditions we are currently asking it to try and flourish in. We would nurture it more. Protect it from wear and tear. And spend time both researching and working on its health.

I hope that this small guide has helped you on your journey of discovery. And I wish you the very best of health for the future.

Disclaimer

Always consult your doctor before trying any medication, Wendy Churchill is not a doctor or medical expert and the content of the Life is a Bag of Revels and A Rough Guide to Food Intolerances should not be viewed as health-care diagnosis, treatment regimen or any other prescribed health-care instruction.

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