

Food Allergies – Often Overlooked Contributors to Chronic Illness

by Simon Yu, M.D.

Food allergies are often not included in a Medical Doctor's diagnostic assessment of one's problems. They are also often not included in dietary considerations. In spite of these two oversights, food allergies are often major contributors to a wide variety of unexplainable symptoms. The most allergic foods in the American diet are the foods we consume most frequently: wheat, dairy products, corn, eggs, citrus products, soy, and peanuts. Food sensitivities can also be triggered by chemicals in our food such as preservatives, pesticides, fungicides, insecticides and food spoilage chemicals such as sulfites.

No one wants to be sick, but where does disease really begin? Illness develops because one's immune system is weakened. This is indisputable yet often not acknowledged. Complementary and Alternative Medicine is based upon this premise. The disease itself represents a "red flag" that a person has sustained immune system deterioration for some time. To eliminate illness, the immune network needs to be strengthened. Alternative medicine equips the body with tools to restore its own immune system.

Any single vulnerable link in the immune system, such as food allergies and sensitivities, can create favorable conditions for a vast range of illnesses. More often, many factors bombard the immune system over time. While symptoms are not immediately apparent, the progressive weakening of the immune system can lead to chronic illness that is not attributed to one specific cause. Unlike most conventional disciplines, alternative medicine examines the *whole* person as a means to uncover informational clues necessary for proper therapy.

Five principle causes of immune system deterioration are: Heavy Metal Toxicity, Food Allergies, Parasites, Poor Diet and Nutrition, and Dental Problems. This article is the second of a series that address immune system weakeners individually. (For the first article, titled "Five Principle Causes of Illness", which introduces the series and discusses heavy metal toxicity, refer to the web site listed below.)

In the old days, life was simple. Survival was dependent upon living in harmony with nature. Native people lived and ate what was available in nature and had a deep reverence for food and celebrated the changing seasons with the new harvested food. Over the past 100 years, that special reverence and respect for food has been rapidly diminishing, and replaced with mass marketed, highly processed fast food, and lately genetically modified foods. No wonder heart disease and cancer became number one and two killers in this country. Diabetes and obesity are also of epidemic proportion. All of these diseases are strongly linked to our diet.

James C. Breneman, M.D., past chairman of the Food Allergy Committee of the American College of Allergists reported that many chronic illnesses are related to food allergies. He also said that even gallbladder attacks could be completely avoided by eliminating allergenic foods from the diet.

Food allergies and sensitivities not only cause a variety of gastrointestinal, respiratory, and skin problems, but also contribute to chronic fatigue, headaches, depression, sinus infections, palpitations, fluid retention, weight gain, behavioral problems, poor memory, and learning disabilities. (For a checklist of common symptoms of food allergies, look up the web site below, click on "Articles by Dr. Yu", and look for the title, "Food Allergy Symptoms Checklist.")

Once a diagnosis is made for the specific food allergens, avoidance of the offending food is the first step in a specific and practical treatment program. Avoidance of the allergens is just the first step because there are often multiple causes to illness. Other causes include leaky gut, fungal and yeast infections, heavy metal toxicity, parasites, and dental problems. Often when treatment of the underlying problems includes addressing the multiplicity of causes, food allergies can be reduced. Over time it is possible that foods that once caused allergic reactions may even be able to be eaten normally.

Skin testing for food allergies has not been consistently reliable, so I recommend the IgG ELISA blood test. This test determines delayed allergic reaction to one hundred of the most common foods in the typical American diet. Despite the lack of support from the medical community, I work with food allergy and sensitivity everyday and I agree with Dr. Breneman's statement, "Over 60 percent of illness involves food intolerance." In these cases, food allergy testing and an elimination diet is the first step toward improving your health.

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