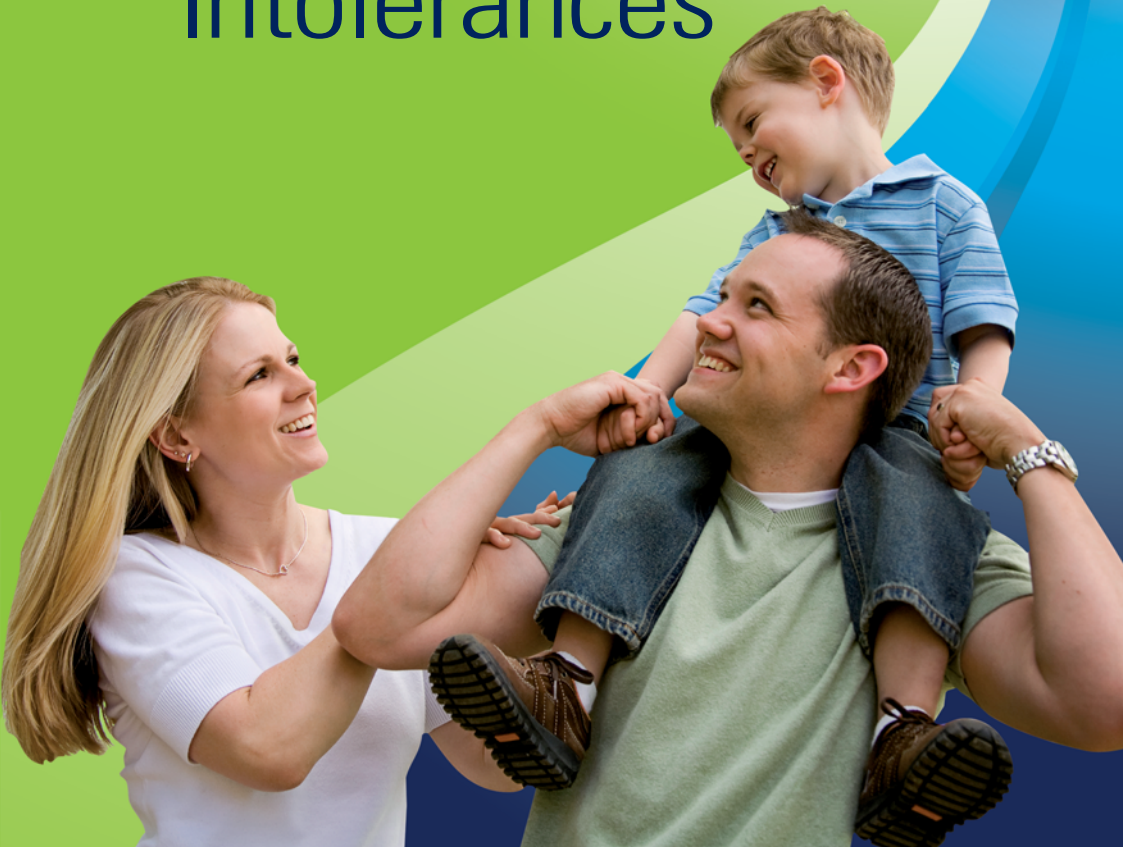


Dairy
Food for Life



MAKING SENSE OF
**Food Allergies
and Food
Intolerances**





Food Sensitivities—What are they?

Food sensitivities include both food allergies and food intolerances.

A food allergy is an abnormal response to a harmless food. It involves the immune system. Common foods that cause allergies include everyday harmless foods, such as eggs, nuts and milk. There are other types of allergies that are not caused by food at all. For example, some allergies are triggered by dust or pollen. There can also be a tendency for allergies to 'run in the family'.

A food intolerance on the other hand, is an adverse reaction to food. It doesn't trigger an allergic reaction and the immune system is not involved in this response. An example of a food intolerance is a *gluten intolerance* or a *lactose intolerance*.

Common food allergies and food intolerances	
Eggs (especially egg white)	Peanuts and tree nuts
Soya and soya products	Fish and shellfish
Wheat and wheat products	Gluten
Milk and milk products	Certain additives

Is there a difference in the severity and timing of symptoms?

With a food allergy, the symptoms can develop within minutes of eating the offending food. It is generally a reaction to a protein in the food where the immune system mistakenly identifies the protein as something harmful.

An allergic reaction can produce a wide variety of symptoms, the most common being skin reactions (e.g. eczema), digestive reactions (e.g. vomiting, stomach-ache, bloating or diarrhoea) or respiratory tract reactions (e.g. wheezing, runny nose, asthma-like symptoms).

In severe cases, an allergic reaction can be so serious that it is life-threatening. This is called *anaphylactic shock*. The immune system releases histamine within seconds after the allergic individual has come into contact with the allergen (offending food). The throat may swell and make breathing difficult, causing the sufferer to wheeze. The face may swell. Rashes, stomach cramp and vomiting may occur and adrenaline treatment needs to be administered quickly.



Because a food intolerance doesn't involve the immune system, the symptoms are generally less severe and are rarely life-threatening. But if someone eats a food they are intolerant to, this could make them feel ill or affect their long-term health.

How common are food sensitivities?

The true incidence of 'adverse' or 'bad' reactions to foods is unknown, but studies suggest that only a small fraction of people, who think they have a true food allergy, will test positive to the suspected foods.

Food allergies: It is estimated that in Ireland, 5% of children and 3% of adults suffer from food allergies.

Food intolerances: We have no estimate of the number of people in Ireland with food intolerances.

Did you know?

If you are weaning your baby, it is best to introduce one new food at a time. One reason for this is you can watch and learn what tastes and textures your baby particularly likes or dislikes. Another important reason is that it is easy to see if a particular food has caused an adverse reaction if foods are introduced one by one.

What does the treatment and management involve?

Management of a food allergy or a food intolerance involves avoiding the food that triggers the reaction. This can be difficult in practice because the food or its derivatives can be ingredients in other processed food on the supermarket shelf.



Your doctor, dietitian or practice nurse will provide advice on reading labels and avoiding the offending food. They will also make sure that the exclusion diet you follow contains adequate nutrition, even when you avoid the offending food and its derivatives.

How are food allergies and food intolerances diagnosed?

It is vital to seek medical advice if you suspect an adverse food reaction.

Self diagnosis can lead to the unnecessary elimination of important foods from the diet. Your doctor will carry out a full examination and take a medical history. Because food allergies involve the immune system, they can be diagnosed by a skin prick test or a blood test.

However, when there is a reaction to a food but these allergy tests (skin prick tests and blood tests) are negative, the doctor will investigate whether you have a “food intolerance” instead, because there is no evidence that the immune system is involved in the food reaction.

Remember - If you think you or a family member has a food allergy or intolerance, then it is important to get a medical diagnosis as soon as possible. Do not cut food groups out of your diet without supervision, as you could end up missing out on important nutrients.



What is Cow's Milk Allergy and how is it managed?

Cow's milk allergy is an adverse reaction to one or more cow's milk proteins.

This allergy affects approximately 2-3% of babies. However the good news is that most young children 'grow out of it'. In fact, 85% of cases resolve after three years of age. Symptoms can be diverse and can range from vomiting and diarrhoea to anaphylaxis.

Treatment involves a milk-free diet (milk and milk derivatives). Formula fed babies are prescribed nutritionally complete hypo-allergenic substitute milk. So are any breastfed babies who are diagnosed with milk allergy. Goat's and sheep milk and soya drinks are not recommended as suitable alternatives.

It is critical that an accurate diagnosis and advice is sought from a trained professional. Cow's milk allergy is often temporary and it's exclusion from the diet for longer than necessary is undesirable, as young children rely heavily on milk for protein, fat soluble vitamins and essential minerals. Both the timing and reintroduction of milk back into a child's diet should always be conducted under medical supervision.

A consultation with a dietitian is recommended. The NDC recommends a dietitian who is a member of the Irish Nutrition and Dietetic Institute (INDI).



What is Lactose Intolerance and how is it managed?

Lactose is the sugar found naturally in milk. Lactase is the enzyme by which we break down and digest lactose in the body. A deficiency of lactase causes a build up of lactose in the gut, causing symptoms such as vomiting, abdominal pain, diarrhoea and weight loss. Sometimes lactase deficiency may occur temporarily, for example, as a result of gastroenteritis or untreated coeliac disease.

The management of lactose intolerance is quite similar to that of cow's milk allergy. Some additional points to note include:

- Lactose-free infant formulas are available.
- Lactose may be used in many pharmaceutical preparations. Therefore, food and pharmaceutical labels should be read carefully.
- Complete avoidance of dairy foods may not be necessary for children and adults. People with lactose intolerance often find that they can eat cheese and yogurt without a problem. Cheese contains less lactose than milk, and in fact many hard cheeses are virtually lactose-free. Yogurt contains a similar amount of lactose to milk, but it still seems to be easier to digest for people with lactose intolerance. These foods provide a source of dietary calcium and protein.

A consultation with a dietitian is recommended. The NDC recommends a dietitian who is a member of the Irish Nutrition and Dietetic Institute (INDI).

Final Point

Excluding one food only from your diet may not have an impact on your nutritional intake providing other foods of similar value are eaten instead. However, if a whole food group is excluded, as in the case of cow's milk allergy, the nutritional impact could be an issue. Adequate calcium is essential at all stages in life. The Department of Health and Children recommend three servings of dairy every day for children and adults. Teenagers and pregnant or breastfeeding women should aim for five servings per day. If you suspect cow's milk allergy, make sure you have it medically diagnosed and seek dietetic advice to optimise calcium intake.



Useful Contacts

The Irish Nutrition and Dietetic Institute
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The Food Safety Authority of Ireland
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Tel: 01 817 1300
Email: info@fsai.ie
Website: www.fsai.ie

The Irish Anaphylaxis Campaign
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Website: www.irishanaphylaxis.org



The National Dairy Council's packaging mark clearly identifies milk and cream products that have been farmed and processed within the Republic of Ireland. Purchasing products displaying this mark provides assurance that you are supporting thousands of Irish jobs.



The Fresh Milk Club provides an affordable, year-round daily supply of fresh milk to children in Irish schools. To ensure that your child or pupils are benefiting from this nutritious addition to their daily lunchboxes, contact the NDC for a free information pack.

www.thefreshmilkclub.ie



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