



THE BASICS OF FOOD INTOLERANCE

A **GOOD PERSONAL TRAINER** should be able to lead his or her client down a path of measurable and sustained progress. This is achieved by prescribing exercise of a suitable type and intensity and ensuring that nutritional intake corresponds with the client's goals. Should a client not respond as expected, food intolerance is an issue that should be investigated. While it is rare that a trainer will also be able to offer allergy therapy, some basic knowledge in this area is very useful, enabling them to establish whether their client is exhibiting symptoms of intolerance, and to explain the difference between allergy and intolerance, and their options for diagnosis.

Allergy or intolerance?

So, what is the difference between allergy and intolerance? Technically speaking, they are both labels that describe different levels of allergic reaction, and some institutions will use the allergy label to refer to all allergic reactions. However, for most practitioners, 'allergy' refers to *Type A allergic reactions*, mediated by IgE antibodies and involving the release of histamine – this results in an immediate reaction, including anaphylactic reactions. Examples of these Type A reactions include noticeable ones such as asthma, migraine, and eczema. 'Intolerance' is the term used to describe *Type B allergic reactions*, mediated by IgG antibodies and not involving the release of histamine. These reactions are less obvious – they are delayed in their onset and tend to cause less specific complaints.

Allergies and intolerances are different issues, but share many similarities. One of these is that, historically, both have been a poorly-understood ailment affecting a very small proportion of the population, with the unexplained problems that tainted the lives of sufferers destined to remain exactly that. Diagnosis of food allergies, though, has come a long way since the not-so-distant days when the medical establishment insisted that they were a psychological condition. These days, many allergy sufferers are able to enjoy symptom-free lives by exercising prudence in their checking of food labels. However, habits resulting from a modern lifestyle mean that food intolerance is now rampant, and mainstream treatment of sufferers remains hit-and-miss.

Intolerance

Food intolerance is raging. Stress, poor digestion and poor diet are the external influences most likely to trigger

an allergic reaction. Stress leads to poor digestion, which leads to undigested larger food molecules entering the bloodstream. The immune system then reacts to these foreign bodies and, due to stress, over-produces antibodies to the 'invading' substance. The excessive number of antibodies then causes an allergic reaction the next time the food is consumed. Modern lifestyles tend to dictate a regime high in stress, poor digestion and poor diet, so much so that 70 per cent of households now suffer with food intolerance. Most sufferers are unaware that it is the food they are eating that is causing them problems.

The effects of food intolerance are less specific than those of allergies and can affect individuals in very different ways. Wheat intolerance could cause persistent colds, acne, chest pain and ringing in the ears for one person, yet could be the root of excessive sweating, constipation and mouth ulcers in another. The most common symptoms that cause people to seek advice are poor resistance to illness, constant tiredness and difficulty losing weight. Many people suffering from intolerance may never know why they experience such trouble; many simply accept it as a fact of life. It should also be noted, however, that poor nutrition can also cause any of the symptoms mentioned above (and others not mentioned), so both issues should be considered.

Sufferers of intolerance need not endure such problems. Because an intolerance is simply an over-reaction of the immune system that compromises the body's functions, switching off this over-reaction alleviates the problems. This can be done by avoidance of the trigger (eg. the offending food), strengthening the immune system and administering the patient with desensitisation solutions, which allow the body to adjust to the presence of the substance in the body without sparking an over-reaction. Having successfully treated the intolerance, it is very important that the pattern of behaviour that gave rise to the allergic condition is discontinued.

Identifying intolerance

So what should your client do if you, or they, suspect they have a food intolerance? As tempting as it may be, self-diagnosis is ill-advised. The wise decision is to speak to an allergy therapist, (look online at www.naturaltherapypages.com.au or other sites) who may use one of the following tests;

- **Skin prick testing** – injects diluted solutions of an allergen

under the skin, tests for food allergies only. Its clinical use in hospitals can give a false impression of its accuracy.

- **Muscle testing** – tests muscle integrity after exposure to substances. Detects allergies and intolerance. Considered more accurate than other predictive tests as the actual reaction of the body is measured.
- **ELISA (enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay) test** – a lab test that detects food intolerance only, by checking blood for elevated counts of particular antibodies. Considered accurate for assessing food intolerance and a useful, if expensive, tool.
- **Vega test** – a machine is used to test patients reaction to particular allergens. Tests for allergies and intolerance. Accuracy varies in relation to the actual equipment and skill of the practitioner.
- **Elimination diet** – the only 100 per cent accurate test for intolerance. The proof of the pudding is in the eating – or the not eating!

Of course, diagnosis is only the first half of dealing with food intolerance. Following the appropriate treatment is very important – but creating the right environment in which to promote health restoration is crucial. This is where good nutrition comes in to play. A nutrition program must be introduced to encourage healing, with particular attention paid to the intestines (a lack of integrity in the intestinal wall goes hand in hand with allergic reaction). Such an eating plan would include plenty of essential oils, fibre, glutamine and zinc, coupled with a good generic vitamin/mineral intake.

As with all issues pertaining to health, combining specific treatment for the particular issue, with addressing the total matter of wellbeing will always prove most effective. The body is a synergistic unit, and operates when a natural balance is restored. In the case of allergic reactions, this means adding desensitisation solutions, removing allergy triggers and causative habits, reducing immune system stress through fortification of the body with exercise and healthy living, and enhancing nutritional intake to maximise recovery and long-term welfare. ■



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Marek is an exercise and nutrition consultant from Basingstoke, UK. The advice Marek gives is determined by science but delivered in a common-sense manner. He has worked with a range of clients, from members of the public to competing athletes and celebrities.

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