FOOD ALLERGIES

Allergic are You??

What is a food allergy? Food allergy is any adverse reaction to an otherwise harmless food or food component that involves the body’s immune system. Although allergic reactions can occur virtually to any food, most reactions are caused by a limited number of foods: milk, eggs, fish, shellfish, soy, wheat, peanuts, and tree nuts.

What are the symptoms? The most common symptoms involve the gastrointestinal tract, beginning with swelling or itching of the lips, mouth and/or throat. When an offending food enters the stomach, nausea, vomiting, cramping and diarrhea may occur. Itching, eczema, hives, and redness of the skin may also occur. Some people may experience sneezing, a runny nose, shortness of breath, or asthma. Anaphylaxis is a rare but life-threatening condition. Symptoms include severe itching, hives, swelling of the throat, breathing problems, unconsciousness, and even death.

What is food intolerance? Adverse reactions to foods that do not involve the immune system are known as food intolerance.” One of the most common may be the result of the body’s inability to digest sugars in food such as milk sugar intolerance. Other examples are food poisoning, metabolic reactions to food, reactions to drug-like chemicals in foods (e. g. caffeine and amines) and adverse reactions due to chemicals added to food.

How can a food allergy be diagnosed? If a food allergy is suspected, a board certified allergist should be consulted. Diagnosing a food allergy begins with a detailed medical history to identify the suspected food. The physician may suggest keeping a diary of foods eaten and symptoms that occur. Elimination diets are used to help diagnose and treat food allergies. Skin testing may also be useful. The physician might conduct a food challenge where the person eats portions of the suspected food under medical supervision. A testing method in which food extracts are placed under the tongue is unreliable and not an accepted procedure.

What is the treatment for a food allergy? Once the diagnosis of food allergy is confirmed, the only proven therapy is avoiding the offending food. However, do not take a food from your diet without checking with your doctor.

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