

## TRACKING DOWN HIDDEN FOOD ALLERGIES: 3 STEPS

Here's a three-step method for uncovering what food could be bothering you or your child.

### STEP 1: KEEP A FOOD RECORD

Over a four-day period record everything that gets eaten. If you are keeping records for yourself, be sure to include snacks or meals you eat at work or at restaurants. If you're keeping a food record of what your child eats, do it during a four-day period when your child is home all day so you know exactly what he eats. Don't make an issue of your child's food choices during this time or he may sneak (because he craves) the very foods he's sensitive to. Enlist your child's cooperation so that together you can keep an accurate record. Also, keep track of any symptoms that you feel may be caused by food allergies.

Suspected Allergenic Food	Associated Symptoms	Results after Elimination	Notes
Milk Strawberries Peanuts	Facial rash Diarrhea watery eyes cough waking up three times a night	Rash dried up Cough lessened frequency of diarrhea lessened awakened once	Couldn't tolerate milk, but yogurt and cheese okay

### STEP 2: TRY AN ELIMINATION DIET

On your list, circle the foods that you most suspect, paying particular attention to the nasty nine:

- dairy products
- soy
- egg whites
- wheat
- peanuts
- tree nuts
- citrus fruits
- shellfish
- food additives

If you have no hunch what you or your child may be allergic to, seek medical help from your doctor or an allergist. Start your elimination diet at a time when there are no outside influences that make the diet impossible to follow, such as during holidays, birthdays, vacations, parties at work, etc. Once you have picked out the most plausible offenders (with or without your doctor's allergy-testing help), eliminate these for at least ten days (preferably two weeks) and keep track of any reactions. Avoid multiple-ingredient foods during this time, since these may contain multiple potential allergens, making it difficult to isolate the single offender. Focus on objective signs and symptoms; changes in mood or behavior are harder to evaluate.

#### **NUTRITIP:** Play Food Detective

Enlist the help of your child to uncover the hidden food allergies. Make a game out of it. Explain to your child that there's something in some food that causes her to have a rash and a sore tummy, "Let's see if we can figure out what it is by playing food detective." Tell your child that "the rash gives

us a clue, so we need to write down all the foods you eat, so we can figure out what causes the rash."

### **STEP 3: CHALLENGE YOUR FINDINGS**

It's humanly impossible to be perfectly objective in pinpointing offending foods and what quantities of them cause reactions. Because you don't want to eliminate nutritious foods from you or your child's diet without good reason, it's a good idea to test your findings by reintroducing suspicious foods one at a time, seeing if the concerning signs and symptoms reappear. If they do, that food goes on your no-no list, at least for a few months. Later you can find out whether or not your allergy is dose-related by reintroducing the food, beginning with a small amount once every four days and then increasing both the amount you eat and how often you eat it until your most annoying signs reappear. This threshold effect is especially characteristic of dairy allergies. Some people can't even drink one glass of milk a day, but they can tolerate a cup of yogurt every other day.

#### **NUTRITIP: Beware of Combination Allergies**

Allergens may appear in the most unlikely places, so get used to reading the ingredient list. A candy bar, for example, may contain corn, dairy, gluten, soy, colorings and additives – all of which are potential food allergens.

### **THE QUICK-DETECTION METHOD FOR ZEROING IN ON FOOD ALLERGIES**

Use this method if you are a well-disciplined adult. It is more difficult to use successfully on a child.

**1. Eliminate the possible suspect foods, beginning with the nasty nine, for a period of at least a week or ten days.** During this time, eat only the least allergenic foods, such as: fresh fruits (except berries and citrus), avocados, rice, barley, millet, poultry, and lamb. All the foods, if possible, should be organic and free of additives, dyes, and colorings.

**2. Reintroduce one new food each week** to see if symptoms reappear.

How much time, energy, and expense you are willing to spend on tracking down food allergies depends upon how much they bother you or your child, and whether your symptoms are getting better or worse. The good news is that food allergies are one medical problem where you can truly say that children will "grow out of it." Most food allergies in children either become less severe or entirely disappear as they get older. Of course, if the child is miserable and is making everyone else miserable, too, you may not want to wait for him to grow older to do something about them.

#### **NUTRITIP: Sweetener Allergy**

Once upon a time we physicians were all taught that the body can only be allergic to proteins. But once again, others' observations are at odds with scientists. Many wise parents report that their infant or child goes berserk after high doses of sweeteners, such as corn syrup. Even the purists among allergists are beginning to believe in the concept of brain allergy, meaning that the chemicals a person eats can have a profound effect on biochemistry -- thinking, feeling, and behaving. Corn syrup is a common sweetener in processed foods, baby formulas, and sodas. The fact that corn syrup has become so prevalent in the American diet may account for an increasing number of allergies to it. As one mother who successfully tracked down her infant's gassiness, diarrhea, night-waking and fussy behavior to corn syrup wrote us, "I feel that there is a corn syrup conspiracy going on in our country."