

FOOD INTOLERANCES & ALLERGIES

RECOGNISING THE SIGNS

Could your symptoms be linked to food?

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Recognising the Signs

Could your symptoms be linked to food?

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My Thoughts

One of the biggest mistakes I made for years was assuming that how I felt was simply "normal."

I accepted feeling tired.

I accepted digestive discomfort.

I accepted headaches.

I accepted brain fog.

I accepted that my body just worked differently.

Looking back, I wish I'd become curious much sooner.

Not because every symptom was caused by food—it wasn't.

But because I had stopped asking questions.

As a psychotherapist, I now see something very similar in many of the people I work with.

People often arrive because they're anxious, exhausted or overwhelmed. Sometimes they're struggling to concentrate, sleeping poorly or feeling generally unwell. They tell me they've been putting up with these symptoms for years because they've become part of everyday life.

One of the first things I encourage people to do is become an observer rather than a critic.

Instead of asking, "What's wrong with me?" I encourage them to ask, "What patterns am I noticing?"

That shift in perspective can be incredibly powerful.

Your Body Is Constantly Giving You Information

Our bodies are remarkably good at communicating.

The challenge is that we don't always recognise the messages.

Sometimes symptoms appear immediately after eating.

Sometimes they don't appear until hours—or even days—later.

Sometimes they're obvious.

Sometimes they're subtle.

The important thing is not to jump to conclusions but to become curious about recurring patterns.

If the same symptoms repeatedly occur, they're worth exploring with an appropriate healthcare professional.

Common Symptoms People Notice

Food intolerances can affect people in many different ways, and no two people will experience exactly the same symptoms.

Some of the most commonly reported include:

Digestive Symptoms

Bloating

Excessive wind

Abdominal discomfort

Diarrhoea

Constipation

Nausea

Indigestion

These are often the first symptoms people notice, but they can also be associated with conditions such as IBS, coeliac disease, inflammatory bowel disease or infections.

Fatigue

Feeling tired after a busy week is completely normal.

Feeling exhausted every day despite getting enough sleep deserves further investigation.

Persistent fatigue has many possible causes including anaemia, thyroid disorders, poor sleep, mental health difficulties, hormonal changes and nutritional deficiencies.

Food may be one possible factor, but it is rarely the only explanation.

Brain Fog

This is one of the symptoms people often struggle to describe.

They tell me they feel as though they're thinking through cotton wool.

Words don't come easily.

Concentration becomes difficult.

Simple decisions suddenly feel complicated.

Brain fog isn't a diagnosis in itself. It's a symptom that can occur for many different reasons, including poor sleep, stress, menopause, medical conditions, medication and, for some people, dietary factors.

Skin Changes

Our skin often reflects what's happening inside our bodies.

Some people experience eczema flare-ups, itching or unexplained rashes.

Others notice dry skin or increased sensitivity.

Again, there are many possible explanations, including allergies, skin conditions, environmental factors and certain medical conditions.

Persistent skin changes should always be assessed appropriately.

Headaches and Migraines

Headaches affect millions of people.

For some, dehydration is the trigger.

For others, it's stress, hormones, lack of sleep or vision problems.

Some individuals notice that particular foods appear to trigger headaches or migraines.

Keeping a record of symptoms can sometimes help identify patterns that may otherwise go unnoticed.

Joint and Muscle Pain

People are often surprised to learn that joint discomfort is sometimes discussed alongside food intolerances.

Joint pain has many medical causes, including arthritis, autoimmune conditions and injury.

However, some people report improvements when they identify foods that don't agree with them.

This highlights why it's important to look at the whole person rather than focusing on one symptom in isolation.

Could It Be Something Else?

Absolutely.

One of the most important messages I want to share is that symptoms should never be self-diagnosed.

The symptoms associated with food intolerances can also occur in many other conditions, including:

Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)

Coeliac disease

Inflammatory bowel disease

Gallbladder disease

Hormonal changes

Thyroid disorders

Iron deficiency

Vitamin deficiencies

Medication side effects

Anxiety and chronic stress

This is why I always encourage people to work with their GP or another appropriate healthcare professional when symptoms persist.

The Value of Keeping a Food and Symptom Diary

One of the simplest and most helpful tools can be a food and symptom diary.

You don't need to record every calorie or weigh every ingredient.

Instead, simply note:

What you ate and drank

The time you ate

Any symptoms you experienced

When the symptoms started

Stress levels

Sleep quality

Exercise

Medication changes

After a few weeks, patterns may begin to emerge.

Sometimes those patterns point towards food.

Sometimes they highlight stress.

Sometimes they suggest something completely different.

Either way, they provide useful information to discuss with a healthcare professional.

What I've Learned

One thing I've learned through both my own experiences and my work with clients is that our bodies rarely behave without reason.

Symptoms aren't there to annoy us.

They're there to tell us something.

That doesn't mean we should become frightened by every ache or pain.

It means we should remain curious.

Listening to your body isn't about becoming hypervigilant.

It's about recognising when something feels different, persists over time or begins affecting your quality of life.

What Current Evidence Tells Us

Current guidance suggests that persistent symptoms should always be assessed appropriately rather than being attributed to food alone.

A detailed medical history, symptom diary and, where appropriate, further investigations are often far more helpful than making assumptions or following restrictive diets based on information found online.

Good assessment looks at the whole person.

Not just the symptoms.

Key Takeaways

Persistent symptoms deserve attention.

Food intolerances are only one possible explanation.

Many medical conditions share similar symptoms.

Keeping a food and symptom diary can provide valuable information.

Seek medical advice before removing large groups of foods from your diet.

Curiosity is far more helpful than self-diagnosis.

Before You Go...

If you've recognised yourself in this article, I hope you'll remember one thing.

Your symptoms matter.

Whether they're caused by food, stress, hormones, a medical condition or something else entirely, they're worth understanding.

Don't dismiss them because you've "always been like this."

Don't compare yourself to other people.

And don't feel that you have to figure everything out on your own.

Our bodies are incredibly good at communicating with us.

Sometimes, they just need us to slow down long enough to listen.

That simple act of paying attention may be the beginning of understanding yourself in a completely new way.

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YorkTest: Available Tests and Practitioner Discount

YorkTest offers a wider range of home-to-laboratory options, including: Premium Food Intolerance Test; Food Allergy Test; Food Intolerance & Allergy Bundle; Junior Food Intolerance Test; Gut Microbiome Test; Annual Health Test; Essential Health Check; Stress (Cortisol) Test; Female Hormones Test; Female Fertility Test; Menopause Test; Male Hormones Test; Thyroid Test; Liver Function Test; Cholesterol Test; Inflammation (CRP) Test; Vitamin D Test; Metabolic Health Test; and couples, parent-and-child, family and complete health-and-nutrition bundles.

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Testing should be considered alongside symptoms, clinical history and appropriate professional advice. A food allergy can be serious: suspected immediate allergy symptoms require medical assessment. IgG

food-reactivity testing is different from diagnostic IgE allergy testing and remains debated, so results should not be used alone to diagnose illness or begin a highly restrictive diet.