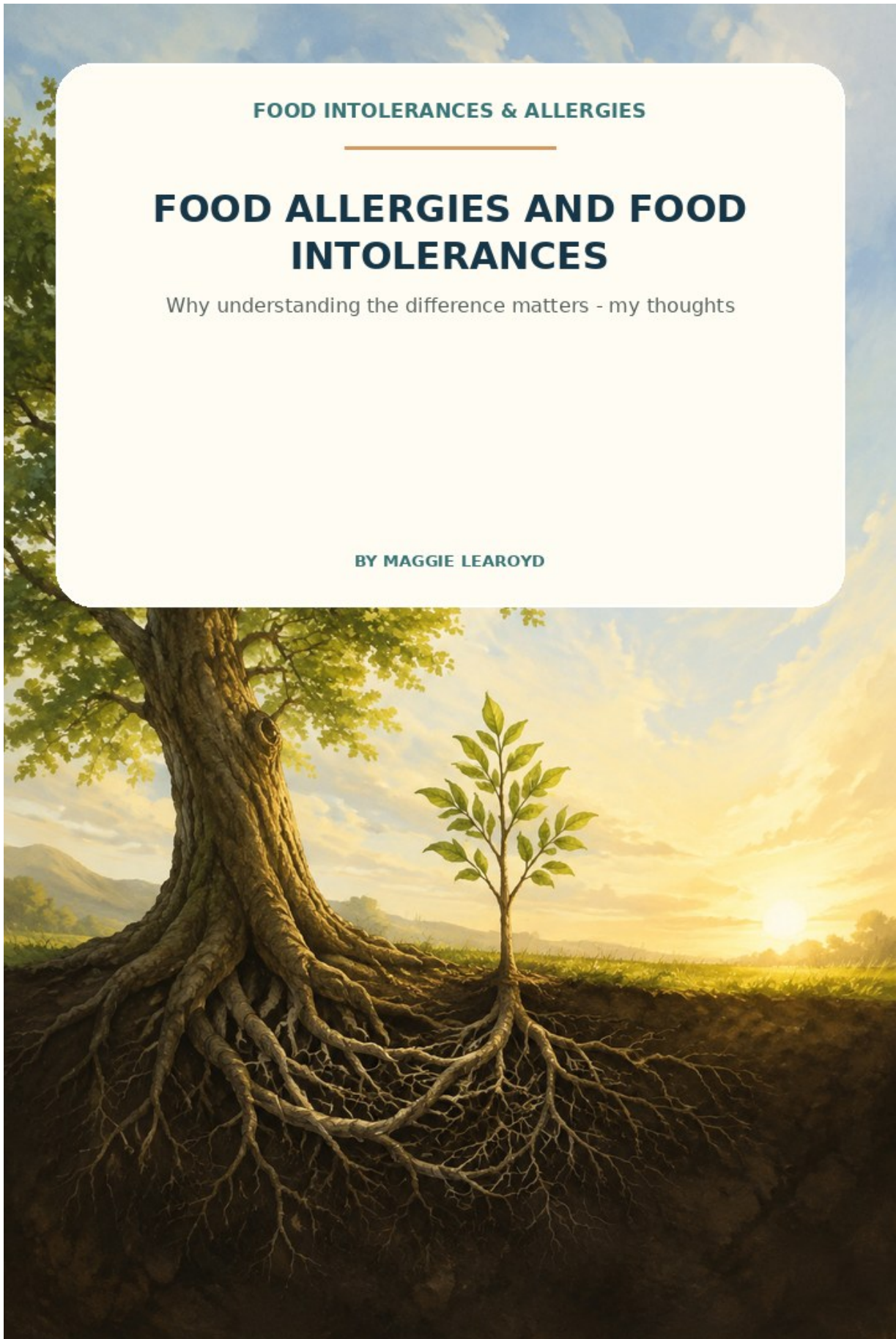


FOOD INTOLERANCES & ALLERGIES

FOOD ALLERGIES AND FOOD INTOLERANCES

Why understanding the difference matters - my thoughts

BY MAGGIE LEAROYD



Food Allergies and Food Intolerances

Why understanding the difference matters - my thoughts

Over the years, I've lost count of how many conversations I've had with people who tell me they think they have a food allergy, only to discover that what they're experiencing may actually be a food intolerance.

The two terms are often used interchangeably, and it's completely understandable why. Both involve food, both can make us feel unwell and both can have a significant impact on everyday life. However, they are not the same, and understanding the difference is incredibly important.

My interest in food intolerances didn't begin in a textbook.

It began with my own life.

Having lived with ARFID since I was nine years old and later discovering I was autistic and ADHD, food has always been far more than nutrition for me. It's been connected to sensory experiences, anxiety, predictability and feeling safe.

As I became older, I started noticing that certain foods affected me in ways I couldn't explain. Sometimes I felt exhausted, sometimes mentally foggy, sometimes my digestive system seemed to react for no obvious reason.

Those experiences made me curious.

Not frightened.

Curious.

That curiosity led me to learn more about food intolerances, allergies and how differently every body responds to food.

As both a psychotherapist and someone with lived experience, I've also noticed how many people spend years believing that feeling uncomfortable after eating is simply something they have to live with.

Sometimes that's true.

Sometimes it isn't.

The first step is understanding what your body might be trying to tell you.

So, What's the Difference?

Although food allergies and food intolerances are often spoken about as though they're the same thing, they involve very different processes within the body.

Food Allergies

A food allergy involves the immune system.

When someone with a food allergy eats even a tiny amount of the food they're allergic to, their immune system mistakenly identifies it as harmful and reacts immediately.

Symptoms can develop within minutes and may include:

Swelling of the lips, tongue or throat

Difficulty breathing

Wheezing

Hives or an itchy rash

Vomiting

Dizziness

Collapse

Anaphylaxis, which is a medical emergency

For people living with a diagnosed food allergy, strict avoidance of the food is essential, and many carry emergency medication such as adrenaline auto-injectors.

Food allergies should always be assessed and managed by an appropriate healthcare professional.

Food Intolerances

Food intolerances are different.

They do not usually involve the same immediate immune response seen in allergies and are rarely life-threatening.

Instead, symptoms may develop gradually, sometimes several hours or even days after eating a particular food, making them much harder to identify.

Common symptoms may include:

Bloating

Wind

Stomach pain

Changes in bowel habits

Brain fog

Fatigue

Headaches

Joint discomfort

Skin changes

Feeling generally unwell

One of the reasons food intolerances can be so frustrating is that the symptoms are often vague and may be mistaken for stress, ageing, hormonal changes or simply having a busy lifestyle.

What I've Seen

One thing I've learned through working with clients is that many people have stopped listening to their bodies.

Not because they don't care, but because they've become used to feeling uncomfortable.

I've met people who assumed everyone felt exhausted after eating.

Others believed constant bloating was normal.

Some had accepted headaches, brain fog or digestive discomfort as just part of everyday life.

Sometimes these symptoms are unrelated to food.

Sometimes they are connected to other medical conditions.

And occasionally, food may be one piece of a much bigger picture.

This is why curiosity is so important.

Rather than jumping to conclusions or cutting out lots of foods unnecessarily, I encourage people to become gentle observers of their own bodies.

Notice patterns.

Keep an open mind.

Seek professional advice when needed.

My Own Experience

For me, discovering my own food intolerances wasn't about finding a miracle solution.

It was about understanding myself.

Once I began recognising which foods didn't suit my body, many things started making more sense.

I wasn't searching for perfection.

I was searching for understanding.

That has become one of the greatest lessons I've learned—not just about food, but about health in general.

Our bodies are constantly communicating with us.

The challenge is learning how to listen without becoming fearful.

Before You Go...

If there's one message I'd like you to take away from this article, it's this:

Food allergies and food intolerances are different, but both deserve to be taken seriously.

An allergy can be life-threatening and always requires appropriate medical assessment and management.

A food intolerance may not be life-threatening, but it can still have a significant impact on how you feel physically and emotionally.

Neither should be dismissed.

If you've recognised yourself in some of these symptoms, don't panic and don't rush to remove lots of foods from your diet.

Instead, become curious.

Start noticing patterns.

Ask questions.

Seek appropriate advice.

Sometimes understanding your body begins with simply paying attention to what it has been trying to tell you all along.

Thank you for taking the time to read this article.

I hope it's the beginning of a journey towards understanding your own body with curiosity, compassion and confidence.

Maggie Learoyd

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Founder of Space to Breathe Therapy

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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.