COEM Discusses the Differences Between Food Allergies and Food Sensitivities

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The Center for Occupational & Environmental Medicine (COEM) is offering new and existing patients an explanation about food allergies and food sensitivities and the differences between the two.

Food allergies are a type of immune reaction to specific foods or food components that can cause a range of symptoms, from mild to severe. When someone with a food allergy ingests the allergen, their immune system incorrectly identifies it as a harmful substance and produces an antibody called immunoglobulin E (IgE) to fight against it.

When the allergen is ingested again, it triggers the immune system to release chemicals, including histamine, which can cause a range of symptoms, such as hives, itching, swelling, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain or cramping, difficulty breathing, wheezing, dizziness, lightheadedness, and even anaphylaxis, a potentially life-threatening reaction that can cause difficulty breathing, a rapid drop in blood pressure, and loss of consciousness.

Common food allergens include milk, eggs, peanuts, tree nuts, soy, wheat, fish, and shellfish, although any

food can potentially cause an allergic reaction. Food allergies can develop at any age but are often diagnosed in childhood. Many patients however are misdiagnosed and suffer from both food allergies and food sensitivities well into adulthood without relief. Identifying the offending foods, which are often the ones eaten most often, is critical in reducing or eliminating symptoms.

Food sensitivities, on the other hand, are not allergies but instead a reaction in the body to the ingestion of a particular food item. Also known as food intolerances, they are a type of adverse reaction to certain foods that do not involve the immune system. Unlike food allergies, which involve a specific immune response to an allergen, food sensitivities can be caused by a variety of factors and can produce a wide range of symptoms.

Food sensitivities can be caused by several factors, such as enzyme deficiencies, which can make it difficult for the body to digest certain foods (e.g., lactose intolerance), food additives, such as preservatives, artificial colors, and flavorings, food poisoning, which can cause temporary sensitivity to certain foods, and psychological factors, such as stress or anxiety, which can trigger gastrointestinal symptoms

Some common symptoms of food sensitivities include bloating, gas, or abdominal pain, diarrhea or constipation, nausea or vomiting, headaches or migraines, skin rash or itching, and fatigue or weakness. Unlike food allergies, which can be life-threatening, food sensitivities are generally not dangerous, but they can be uncomfortable and affect the quality of life. The best way to manage food sensitivity is to identify and avoid any offending food or ingredient. An elimination diet or food diary may help identify problem foods.

Patients undergoing provocation neutralization testing can screen for food allergies and food sensitivities. Where there is a reaction identified through this testing, allergy extracts can be made which include the offending foods and, when taken on a regular course of treatment, can reduce the effects of exposure to the offending foods. In some cases, patients can completely stop future reactions and go back to eating the foods to which they are allergic or sensitive after a course of treatment with allergy extract.

The spokesperson for COEM talks about the important distinction between food allergies and sensitivities by saying, ?In 1967, Dr. Ishizaka isolated the protein IgE as the specific marker to identify allergic reactions. So, the medical community accepted the term allergy to only include IgE-mediated reactions. This is, however, unhelpful for patients who suffer from food sensitivities that trigger debilitating symptoms. They do not get the right diagnosis from their medical professionals to address their condition. Here at COEM, we prefer to use the terms ?food and chemical sensitivity? regardless of whether the reaction is IgE mediated. For over 45 years, we have been helping identify the cause of chronic disease and disorders through comprehensive diagnostic evaluation, utilizing allergy and sensitivity testing as needed.?

Readers can head over to COEM?s website to find out more about the plethora of treatment options it offers and read testimonials from patients who experienced a life-changing return to good health. The center can be contacted at (843) 572-1600 to schedule an appointment.

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Center for Occupational & Environmental Medicine

COEM is the premier medical center for the treatment of toxicity from mold, chemicals, heavy metals, and adverse drug reactions for over 45 years.

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