

FOOD INTOLERANCES EASY ON THE TESTS

Tests at risk of being overused, as indicated by The Italian Society of Dietetics and Clinical Nutrition and The Italian Society of Allergy, Asthma and Clinical Immunology

Today one out of four people attributes their symptoms of discomfort to food intolerances or allergies. Data suggests that this may only be accurate in a very small number of cases, around 3–5%. Non-conventional medicine, which is gaining in popularity, probably also has a role in these mistaken convictions. While this discipline often correctly emphasizes global health and lifestyle – including stressing the importance of a balanced diet – there is sometimes an attempt to identify food intolerances of one sort or another as the cause of any type of disorder. Pharmacies, health stores and herbal stores offer their often expensive “food intolerance tests”, based on methods that are unsupported by solid scientific data. It sometimes happens that people get convinced of having a certain food intolerance, even with no symptoms normally associated with these illnesses. This is the case, for example, of people suffering from obesity who, not being able to lose weight, take one of these tests to identify a food that might be impeding weight loss. However, obesity is neither correlated with allergies nor food intolerances, but is largely determined by one’s own habits (nutrition and lifestyle) and metabolism. The result, besides a waste of money, is that people eliminate certain foods without good

reason, impoverishing their diet and risking imbalances.

LET’S UNDERSTAND WHY

The so-called “food intolerance tests” such as applied kinesiology, the cytotoxic test, neutralisation test, Vega test and other electrodermal tests, bioresonance test, pulse test and hair analysis are always inappropriate as they are based on insufficiently solid scientific evidence, and are neither repeatable nor reproducible, nor able



to diagnose any illness tied to nutrition. Other tests like the IgG4, instead, are based on a conceptual error. The presence of IgG4 antibodies is not a sign of food intolerance or allergy, but rather a normal physiological immune response in the face of foreign elements in our body.

WHICH FOOD INTOLERANCE EXAMS ARE RELIABLE

Generic food intolerance tests, especially when taken without medical advice, are always inappropriate. If one suspects suffering from food intolerances, the following are the only valid diagnostic tests:

- Hydrogen breath test. To be taken under the guidance of a gastroenterologist, this test identifies lactose intolerance when the enzyme that digests lactose (the sugar present in milk) is missing.
- Serologic screening for celiac disease when gluten, contained in many cereals (pastas, bread) is suspected. To be taken under the guidance of a gastroenterologist.
- Oral exposure tests for some preservatives that cause allergy-like symptoms (sulphites, benzoates, tartrazines...). These tests are to be taken under the guidance of allergy doctors and are only performed in the hospital or doctor’s office.

To learn more: “Sapore ed equilibrio” (in Italian), Altroconsumo Practical Guide series on www.altroconsumo.it/guidepratiche.

Project “Doing more does not mean doing better – Choosing Wisely Italy”
www.slowmedicine.it
www.choosingwiselyitaly.org

DIETARY INTOLERANCES ADVICE FROM ALTROCONSUMO



- Avoid taking generic tests for food intolerances as they are useless, costly and potentially damaging to your health. They may in fact encourage you to follow an unbalanced diet, without solving the problem, but rather creating new ones.
- Keep in mind that variety is key to a balanced diet. Eliminating all foods from a specific group (for example, all dairy) is never recommended.
- If you have gastroenterological issues, turn to your general practitioner right from the start.
- Do not forget that many illnesses related to the digestive system may be tied to stress. Stress can inhibit the production of digestive juices as well as the motility of the stomach and intestine, thus impeding digestion and food absorption. Furthermore, stress produces cortisol, which stops the production of gastric mucosa and consequently makes the stomach more vulnerable.
- Relaxation techniques like yoga, meditation, psychotherapy, or simply dedicating time to pleasurable activities, can help re-establish inner balance, combat stress and help the digestive system function better.