

# Headaches, fatigue can be a (food) sensitive issue

Food sensitivities can be just as damaging as allergies, but they're harder to decipher.

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"No, sorry, I'm sensitive to chicken," the woman said as she passed by some samples at the Aventura Whole Foods.

«'Sensitive?' I asked. ``You mean you're allergic to chicken?"

«'Not allergic," she said. ``Just sensitive."

I then received a 10-minute introduction into the world of food sensitivities and intolerances. We've all heard about food allergies, when nuts, dairy, gluten or something causes hives or itching, and in the worst cases, is life-threatening. You eat the bad stuff and your body instantly tells you.

Food sensitivities can be just as damaging, but are more complex to decipher. Researchers believe they contribute to everything from migraines to chronic fatigue to irritable bowel syndrome to acid reflux. For people trying to shed unwanted pounds, intolerant foods are harder to digest, don't metabolize well, and have a nasty tendency to stick around as fat.

But it's not easy to recognize your intolerant foods. Only your body knows, as white blood cells react to the foods and wreck havoc over time with your health. My Whole Foods friend told me about ALCAT, a Deerfield Beach-based company that for more than 20 years has perfected a system for testing up to 200 foods, additives, colorings, molds and even environmental chemicals from a blood test.

I'm 57, five-seven, weigh 112, work out regularly and eat healthy foods. However, I am a migraine sufferer, usually once or twice weekly. Although I knew migraines could be exacerbated by certain foods like red wine, aged cheese, and even chocolate, I had eliminated them at different times, and never discovered my headache trigger.

In mid-June I went to ALCAT (your own doctor can draw the blood and send them the sample). The tests cost between \$199 to \$949, depending on how many foods, additives, and chemicals are tested. Insurance may cover part of it, but you need to check your policy.

I was surprised by the results. ALCAT classifies the intolerances as severe, moderate and mild. It then provides a long list of acceptable foods. Red-lined "severe" food should be avoided for at least six months. For me, that meant feta cheese, oats (no oatmeal!), and halibut. Turns out that your body reacts negatively to certain foods either from your genetic makeup, or over-exposure, especially if there isn't enough variety in what you eat.

On my yellow list, moderate, I should avoid for three to six months some things I really love, like ALL wheat and gluten products, which I learned can contribute to bloating.

Finally, on my mild intolerance list, which means I should have them no more than once every four days, there is my daily cup of java, lamb, pork, tuna, strawberries, crab, coconut and too many others to list.

The good news is that you don't have to give up these foods forever. Once your body is detoxed for half a year, you slowly reintroduce the foods one by one, and see how you feel.

Six weeks into the program, I can see the changes. I've had 45 days of no migraines. Also, the swelling on two knuckles has gone down about 50 percent. And my post nasal drip has stopped completely. My energy, even without my morning coffee, is as good or better than ever.

«'I'm not surprised," says Dr. Judy Woolger, co-director of the University of Miami's Executive Medicine Program and who utilizes traditional and complementary wellness techniques in her practice. ``Patients come in not feeling well, and they have had all the traditional tests, but sometimes it takes something like ALCAT to get a better diagnosis and make them healthier."

So, now I have a scientific snapshot of those foods to which my body is intolerant. By New Year's, I hope I'll still be headache free, even though my frequent visits to Starbucks may be a treat of the past.