

► Are Food Sensitivities Sabotaging Your Health?

Responsible for chronic inflammation, digestive issues, skin problems and more, food sensitivities could be at the root of your symptoms

By Christine M. Okezie, CHHC

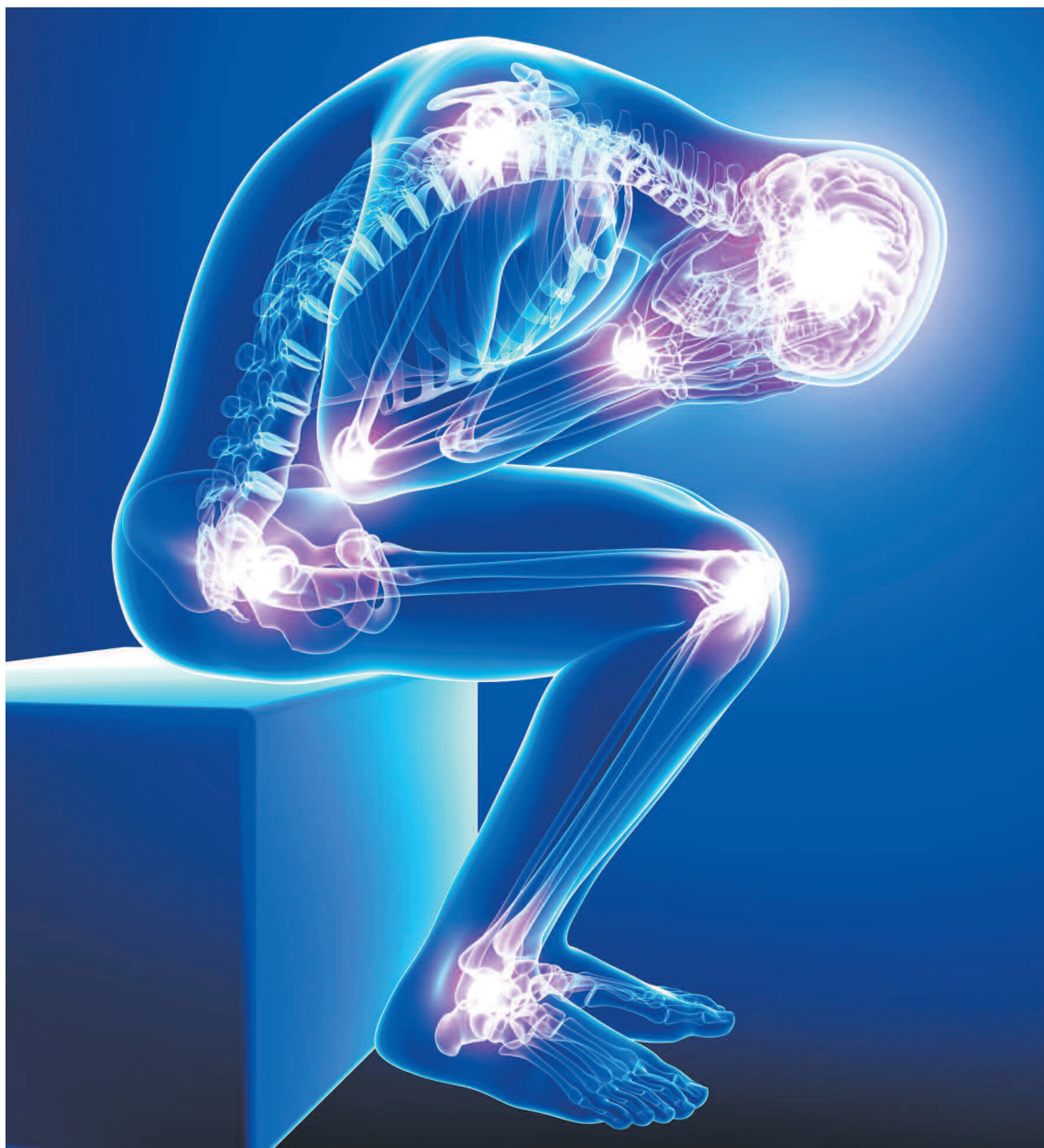


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IN TODAY'S WORLD OF GENETICALLY MODIFIED FOOD, pesticides and fungicides, food isn't what it used to be — and our bodies can not only tell, but they are fighting back.

An estimated 75 percent of Americans is affected by food sensitivities needlessly wreaking havoc on their quality of life. These are not the same as food allergies. When you eat a food you are allergic



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to, your immune system reacts immediately. For example, you might get hives, swelling, itching or a rash. In contrast, food sensitivities are much more difficult to diagnose because symptoms are oftentimes much more individualized, wide-ranging, subtle and might even be delayed for a couple days after you eat a certain food. For most people, signs of a food sensitivity often go un-

detected as they don't realize their symptoms are related to a food they are eating on a daily basis.

So what exactly happens when we have a food sensitivity? Every time we eat a food we are sensitive to, it causes a delayed inflammatory response in our body. This means the immune system responds to the food as if it were an intruder in the body and mounts an attack.

Unaware and undiagnosed, we continue to eat the offending food regularly and our immune system starts to go haywire, wreaking havoc on our metabolism, and setting the stage for bodywide inflammation and chronic disease. Over the years, a hidden food sensitivity takes its toll throughout the entire body, resulting in a broad range of health challenges from weight gain and irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) to joint pain and more.

My client Eileen struggled with debilitating IBS, fatigue, painful swelling in her hands and feet, weight gain and was recently diagnosed with insulin resistance. She had tried multiple diets and medications, but never suspected that low-grade food allergies to gluten and dairy were the cause of her misery. Within a couple months of eliminating these triggers, Eileen dropped 30 lbs., experienced 100 percent improvement in her digestion and energy level, her blood sugar improved and all swelling abated.

Eileen's story is not unique. Inflammation is now recognized as one of the biggest drivers of obesity and chronic disease, such as heart disease and diabetes. I can't emphasize enough how identifying food sensitivities at the root cause of systemic inflammation can be a critical tool offering profound health benefits.

These are the most common signs that a food sensitivity may be at the root of your symptoms:

- Digestive Upset — Constipation, Diarrhea, Abdominal Pain, Bloating
- Fatigue or Sluggishness
- Obesity, Insulin Resistance, Weight Loss Resistance
- Chronic Sugar or Carbohydrate Cravings
- Brain Fog or Poor Memory
- Joint Pain
- Emotional/Mood Imbalance — Anxiety, Depression
- Skin Problems — Hives, Rash, Acne, Eczema
- Headaches, Nasal Congestion, Coughing
- Swelling of Hands or Feet, Bloating or Puffy Appearance

COMMON FOOD ALLERGENS

The most common food allergens are gluten, wheat, dairy, corn and soy. One of the major reasons so many people are affected by wheat,



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corn and soy is these foods are loaded with pesticides and fungicides. They are often highly processed and most of these foods have been genetically modified from their original forms. Genetically modified organisms, or GMOs, are organisms that have been created in a lab and do not exist in nature. Your body is not used to recognizing these foods, and therefore does not know how to process them.

It is estimated that up to 30 percent of Americans are gluten sensitive. Also, the most common dairy components people have problems with are lactose and casein, the protein found

Recipe:

Salmon and Lentil Salad

Yield: 4-6 servings

Ingredients:

- 1 medium bell pepper, small dice
- 1 seedless cucumber, small dice (about 1 cup)
- 1 small red onion, small dice
- 3 cups steamed lentils (Trader Joe's has ready-to-eat)
- 1 15 oz. can of wild salmon, drained, bones removed and lightly flaked
- 4 cups baby arugula

Dressing:

- Juice of 2 lemons (approx. 6 tablespoons)
- 1/3 cup of extra virgin olive oil
- 1/4 cup fresh dillweed, finely chopped

- 2 teaspoons dijon mustard
- Sea salt and ground pepper to taste

Directions:

1. In a small bowl, whisk together dressing ingredients and set aside.
2. In a large bowl, add bell pepper, cucumber, onion, lentils and salmon, and combine well.
3. Add dressing and toss until well-coated.
4. Plate individual servings on mound of arugula.



in dairy products. Lactose sensitivity occurs when you lack the enzyme required to break down lactose and digest it. Approximately 60 percent of the population has some degree of lactose intolerance.

Sadly, most physicians, especially allergists, don't see the value in diagnosing food sensitivities. This is despite the fact that there is an exploding body of medical and scientific study connecting the relationship among the health of the gut, food and disease.

Here are the two main ways to determine if food sensitivities are sabotaging your health:

Get a Blood Test for Antibodies to Foods. This test, which is called an IgG test, can help identify potential trouble areas. The problem with this test is it's not 100 percent accurate, but it can be a useful guide in helping identify what foods may be causing problems for you.

Do an Elimination and Challenge Diet. This is where you eliminate the top food allergens, starting with gluten and dairy, taking these foods out for a period of time, ideally four to six weeks.

During this time, you're taking note of changes you experience. Then after the elimination phase, you move into the "challenge" phase, where you slowly reintroduce each food to see if there is a reaction and if anything changes. Depending on what changes you notice, you can start to avoid the other top offenders, including corn and soy for another four to six weeks and repeat the challenge step to see if you notice a reaction.

ABOUT CHRISTINE M. OKEZIE

Christine M. Okezie is a graduate of the Natural Gourmet Institute for Health and Culinary Arts in New York, and the Institute for Integrative Nutrition. She founded her company, Your Delicious Balance, to counsel individuals to heal themselves through real food and positive lifestyle choices. Her healing strategies are based on whole foods nutrition, and she guides her clients to adopt a plant-centered way of eating that offers anti-inflammatory and detoxifying benefits to the body. For more information, visit her Web site at www.yourdeliciousbalance.com or call (201) 889-5001.

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"The No Diet Cookbook: Learn to Eat for Health and Pleasure," by Christine M. Okezie