

## Gut Reactions

Not a week goes by when I don't talk to someone who has some type of issue with their gut, or someone who has eliminated complete foods or foods groups in the belief it causes an upset stomach. Being an inquisitive type, I like to find out more information on the person so I would ask do they know which foods cause the symptoms, how long do the symptoms last for and does it cause other symptoms?

Our bodies are amazing things but not all are the same. In the area of nutrition some people can have a range of issues which relates to how their whole body and gut reacts to certain foods. Foods, especially whole unprocessed foods, have a huge range of nutrients within them. With this huge range of nutrients there may be particular nutrients which the human body may identify as foreign and the body reacts with an immune response (an allergen) or may be unable to breakdown and digest (an intolerance).

It's important to remember some food allergies are very serious and the smallest amount of exposure can cause someone to go into anaphylactic shock. Other food allergies may cause other symptoms like an upset stomach, a skin rash, hives or a mild cough. Food intolerances occur in around 10% of the population and can involve groups of foods and the reaction someone gets is usually based on how much is eaten.

Many people are quick to eliminate foods or food groups as a result of reacting to a food. In some cases this may work but in others it may make no difference. The reason for this is the particular food may not be the problem, rather, it may be the chemical found in the food. There are many chemicals found naturally in foods which people can be intolerant to and there are also a range of additives in foods which may do the same. So eliminating one food which has the chemical present may not work if you are eating another food which has the same chemical in it.

The most common foods I see people eliminate from their diet are dairy and grains, particularly wheat based grains. These two foods appear to be the most common where people experience some type of bloating and pain after eating them so they figure the best form of treatment is elimination. In most cases complete elimination is not required unless they have been diagnosed with coeliac disease or lactose intolerance. In these situations it may be more an issue with small chains of sugars which are found in these foods which are not digested. As a result they end up in our large intestine and are consumed by the bacteria which produce gas and this causes bloating, pain and discomfort. These small chains of sugars are referred to as FODMAPs (fermentable, oligo, di and monosaccharides and polyols).

FODMAPs are like other food chemicals and are found in a large range of foods, including wheat and dairy, but the complete elimination of these foods is not necessary because the amount found in different foods may vary and the amount you consume may have an impact on symptoms. So you may find if you're having two slices of multi-grain bread this may cause some upset but if you only have one slice no symptoms appear. So you may be able to enjoy smaller quantities of these foods rather than eliminating them all together.

So what should you do if you suspect you have some type of intolerance, allergy or FODMAP issue? The first thing is don't rely on Dr Google to help diagnose the problem. There are way too many pseudo-experts out there selling rubbish diets with the promise of improving symptoms. Second, go and see an accredited practicing dietitian. These health professionals have extensive training and experience in the management of these types of conditions and will carry out a detailed assessment and diagnose the condition. They will then provide you with a number of strategies to help manage the problem. If they suspect you may need a better diagnosis they will refer you to other specialists if needed. Third is all about being persistent and consistent. Persistent with sticking to the advice the dietitian gives you and consistent with the dietary changes you need to follow. It may take time to identify which foods and the amounts you can eat, but in the long term your health and enjoyment of foods will benefit the most.

*Written by Julian Everett. Julian is the co-owner of Body Basics and has over 25 years fitness, health and nutrition industry experience. He is a qualified personal trainer, strength and conditioning coach and dietitian. If you are interested in a nutrition consultation please contact reception.*