



Can Healthy Food Make You Sick?

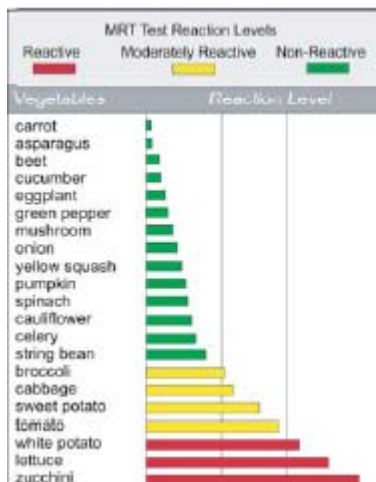
For years I've resisted the idea of widespread food allergies. Severe food allergies like peanuts or shellfish are clear enough, but what about these long lists of problem fruits and vegetables? How could healthy food make someone sick?

Digestive immune reactions can be hard to identify, especially since they are often delayed and dose related. My own digestive problems have led me to explore deeper into the role of food allergies and sensitivities. Healthy food can indeed make some of us sick. In fact in a strange twist of irony, I've recently discovered a number of healthy foods that I don't tolerate including (groan!) spinach.

My story starts 10 years ago when I got sick while trekking in the Himalayas. After a couple rounds of heavy duty antibiotics, I recovered but only temporarily. Testing revealed I have something called dysbiosis – which means the gut bacteria are out of balance.

I learned by trial and error that I could control troublesome GI symptoms with probiotics – but over the years I kept needing higher doses. On occasion I'd get an ineffective batch of my usual product, and the resulting symptoms kept getting worse and worse.

I heard about a type of food sensitivity testing that other dietitians were using with great success, and figured it was worth trying. I thought it would be good both for my clients and for me. In fact, I was my first patient. I sent in a blood sample which was tested against 120 different foods and 30 chemicals. The report includes neat graphs that show the level of sensitivity for each food and chemical tested in a color coded system with green (low reaction), yellow (moderate reaction) and red (highly reactive). This chart is not from my report, but offers an example.



I didn't have any red (highly reactive) foods, but I did have 18 yellow (moderate reaction) foods. Luckily, several of these are foods I rarely eat anyway. Some were foods I already knew I didn't tolerate, and some of them were foods I never would have guessed, including almonds, rice, quinoa and eggs. These are healthy foods – they just aren't healthy for me because my gut, for unknown reasons, identifies these foods as harmful. I'm sensitive to 7 chemicals, including sulfites

(found in wine and balsamic vinegar), potassium nitrate (found in spinach and greens) and saccharine (I had to change toothpaste). I'll probably tolerate a little spinach and greens eventually, but I may need to watch my volume.

Once I had my results, I could start a 5-phase elimination diet. The idea behind this is that for a week I would only eat 25 of the foods I was least sensitive to (the lowest of the greens), and this gives my gut a chance to heal. By the second week I could start adding one food a day from phase 2. Over the course of a month I'll move through the rest of the phases, continuing to add one food a day. During this time I am paying attention to how each food affects me.

The elimination diet is called the "Immunocalm Diet" and my gut calmed down immediately! I went off my probiotics at the start, so this is a real test for how my gut is doing; even without probiotics this is the most normal it has been in 10 years! I've lost 5 pounds, mostly water weight, which I see as a sign that the inflammation is clearing. I am hopeful that other inflammation related symptoms (like the arthritis in my thumb) will improve as I continue to avoid the foods that trigger an immune response.

Eventually my diet will be pretty normal with just a handful of foods I need to avoid and several that I need to limit. I'll continue to "challenge" problem foods to see if I tolerate them better with a healthy gut. In the meantime, I've had a chance to be very creative in my menu planning and try a variety of foods I don't usually use. For instance, I've learned that hazelnut butter, when stirred into soups or stir-fry's, adds a nice creamy texture and good flavor.

It makes me sad that healthy foods could make me sick, but I'm sure glad I found out which ones!

Recipes for the Month

Hazelnut Chicken (or Tofu) Soup

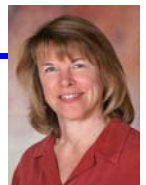
Click the links to the recipe, or find it on my blog at www.HealthyHabitsCoach.wordpress.com

Could you have food sensitivities? I've been trained to work with one of the best tests available to measure food sensitivities. Call me to find out more:
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