Understanding Food Hypersensitivity Testing

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Objectives

- Talk confidently with clients regarding IgE and IgG food sensitivity testing,
- Validate the client’s experience and help them take steps forward,
- Acknowledge the dangers of unnecessary dietary restriction.

Food-Specific IgE Blood Tests

Take Home Messages

- Typically, IgE mediated food allergy causes immediate swelling (skin, respiratory or digestive tract).
- Food specific IgE can be measured through blood or skin tests, but positive results do not mean the person is allergic to the food. The results must be interpreted in relation to the client’s history.
- The dietitian’s role is to provide education and support.

What is IgE?

- Antibody
- Specific targets
- Atopy: sensitized to harmless compounds
  - Plant pollen – hay fever, seasonal allergy
  - Dust/mould – chronic respiratory symptoms
  - Food proteins – immediate food allergy
  - Etc.

IgE Mediated Food Allergy: Symptoms

- Immediate symptoms
- Inflammation (swelling & redness):
  - Respiratory – wheezing, difficulty breathing
  - Skin – hives, swelling, redness
  - Digestive – vomiting, diarrhea
  - Cardiovascular – hypotension, rapid heart beat, shock
  - Anaphylaxis
- Consistent symptoms
- Priority allergens
IgE Mediated Food Allergy: Diagnosis
- Obvious connection between food and symptoms (usually)
- Skin & blood tests measure food-specific IgE
- Positive food ≠ allergy
- Diagnosis starts with history of immediate food allergy

Food-Specific IgE Blood Tests: Method
- ImmunoCAP®
- How is it used:
  - Diagnosis
  - Over time to assess tolerance
  - Assess potential risk in high risk infants
- RAST is outdated technology

Inappropriate Testing Leads to Confusion & Over Restriction
- Food panels are rarely helpful
- Positive food ≠ allergy
- Dietitian’s role

Food-Specific IgG Blood Tests

Take Home Messages
- Food-specific IgG blood tests are the most popular alternative food hypersensitivity testing.
- Research evidence suggests that the testing does not improve health.

Evidence
- IgG main antibody protecting against infection
- We also make food-specific IgG
• Function is not completely understood
• Evidence does not support IgG testing to improve health

Testing Methods
• Lab procedures & recommendations are not standardized
• Typical blood draw or finger prick kit
• Rocky Mountain Analytics, Dynacare, etc.
• Usually ordered by naturopaths & previously pharmacists
• Some tests combine IgE & IgG4

Additional Tests

Take Home Messages
• There are many different philosophies about how food sensitivities can be detected.
• Studies have not been published in peer reviewed journals for any of the tests.

Test Overview
• Blood tests to determine changes in white blood cells
  o MRT (mediator release testing) and LEAP (lifestyle eating and performance)
  o ALCAT
• Body tests detecting energy changes
  o Electrodermal (Vega) testing
  o Applied kinesiology (muscle testing):
    o Nambrudipad’s Allergy Elimination Technique (NAET)
• Other tests
  o Pulse testing
  o Hair Analysis

Helping Clients

Discussing Non-Validated Tests with Clients
• Each test gives a different answer
• But there’s research!
• Theory ≠ useful test
• Elimination and challenge

Helping Clients with Unexplained Food Allergy Symptoms
• You can do it!
• Therapeutic alliance
  o Respect the client’s goals
  o Validate
  o Help client make decisions
• Help clients consider non-food triggers
  o Often, every symptom is blamed on food
  o Explore other symptom triggers
If food is suspected, observe, don’t eliminate

Consequences of Dietary Restriction
- Malnutrition
- Stress – disrupted routine, time and financial burden
- Decreased quality of life
- Difficulty socializing
- Altered relationship with food (orthorexia ?)
- Reduced food tolerance

Further Resources

Key Journal Articles

Key Client Resources
- British Dietetic Association – Food Allergy and Intolerance Testing
  https://www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts/AllergyTesting.pdf
  Colorful PDF with information on a variety of unproven testing methods.
- Food Allergy Research & Education – Blood Tests
  https://www.foodallergy.org/diagnosis-and-testing/blood-tests
  Web article explaining why IgE blood tests and skin tests must be interpreted in relation to the client’s history.