What is a Food intolerance?

Food intolerance is different to food allergy and is an abnormal reaction to food, but it does not involve the immune system and is not life threatening. There are many different types of food intolerance, such as lactose intolerance, gluten intolerance or sensitivity (please note this is different to Coeliac disease), histamine intolerance and intolerance to food additives or chemicals.

The symptoms of a food intolerance can be unpleasant and may include tummy discomfort or pain, diarrhoea, bloating and constipation, red rash on the skin, itching and eczema flare ups and other debilitating reactions. These symptoms can happen immediately after eating or they may be delayed. It is also possible for individuals with food intolerances to tolerate a small amount of the food before a reaction appears.

This can make the diagnosis of food intolerances challenging. If a food intolerance is suspected, it can be helpful to keep a diary of the foods eaten and symptoms experienced.

This can be a helpful way to highlight patterns between foods and symptoms and should be discussed with an appropriate healthcare professional for personalised support.

It is important not to exclude foods for prolonged periods without input from an appropriate healthcare professional as this can result in an unnecessarily restricted diet which may impact growth and development in children.

If you suspect your child has an intolerance to a food it is best to speak to your GP for further advice.

The terms allergy and food intolerance are often used incorrectly by both the public and healthcare professionals and can cause confusion.

More information can be found in a fact sheet produced by the British Dietetic Association (BDA) Food Allergy and Food Intolerance (bda.uk.com)[1]

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This information is evidenced based and correct at the time of writing (March 2024). It is not intended to replace advice given to a child by a healthcare professional. Any concerns about a child's health should be discussed with a GP in the first instance without delay.

[1] https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/food-allergy-food-intolerance.html