

**Health for the Whole Family**  
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**IS FOOD MAKING YOU SICK?**

Like many Americans, you may consider frequent bouts of bloating, constipation and gas as normal. They seem to come with the territory after eating a big meal or dining out at a fast food restaurant. But, what if there was a way to eliminate, or at least lessen, these digestive nuisances from your life? Osteopathic physicians recommend investigating your digestive maladies to determine if certain foods may be the cause of your discomfort.

While potentially life-threatening food allergies, such as an allergy to peanuts or shellfish, affect about 2 to 4 percent of adults, food intolerances are much more common. In fact, nearly everyone experiences symptoms related to food intolerance at some point in their lives. Whereas food allergies involve the immune system, food intolerances most commonly involve only the digestive system and occur when the body is unable to properly digest or breakdown something in a food. Severe instances of food intolerance, such as intolerance to gluten, can also cause significant neurological effects. Common symptoms of food intolerance can cause discomfort in our everyday lives and may include:

- Nausea
- Stomach pain
- Gas, cramps or bloating
- Vomiting
- Heartburn
- Diarrhea
- Headaches
- Cognitive issues
- Hot flashes
- Fatigue

Lactose intolerance, in which the body is unable to properly digest lactose, a sugar found in milk and other dairy products, is the most common food intolerance. In this instance, the

body lacks the enzyme required to properly breakdown the protein. According to the National Institutes of Health, it is estimated that between 30 and 50 million Americans have some degree of lactose intolerance.

Other common food intolerances include an intolerance to chemicals added to food to provide color, enhance taste and protect against the growth of bacteria, such as monosodium glutamate (MSG); to substances called sulfites, which may occur naturally, as in red wine; and to salicylates, which are plant chemicals found naturally in many vegetables, fruits, nuts, coffee, juices, beer and wine. However, any food, when consumed in excessive quantities, can cause digestive symptoms.

So, how do you find out which foods are causing your digestive problems? Two methods are recommended. The first is to keep a food diary to record what you eat and when symptoms occur and to look for the common factors. The second is called an elimination diet, which involves cutting out multiple food groups until you are completely symptom free. You then reintroduce the food groups to your diet, one at a time, so you can pinpoint which foods cause symptoms.

There is no cure for food intolerance. The only way to manage your symptoms is to completely avoid or reduce your intake of the problem foods.

Take the following steps to prevent the symptoms associated with food intolerance.

- Learn which foods in which amounts cause you to have symptoms and limit your intake.
- When dining out, be sure to ask your server how your meal will be prepared. Listen for problem foods contained in the meal that might not be included in the description from the menu.
- Read food labels, even on condiments and seasonings, and check ingredients for problem foods.

If your digestive problems persist or you are having trouble pin-pointing your problem foods, talk with your doctor. Some digestive discomfort can be an indication of more serious digestive problems that can be treated by medical intervention.

Preventive medicine is just one aspect of care osteopathic physicians (D.O.s) provide. Osteopathic physicians are fully licensed to prescribe medicine and practice in all specialty areas including surgery. D.O.s are trained to consider the health of the whole person and use their hands to help diagnose and treat their patients.

**\*The contributing physician to this article was Ray E. Stowers, DO, an osteopathic family physician from Harrogate, Tenn.**