

5 Things to Consider When Food Allergy Testing

Shandee Chernow is the president and CEO of Certistar (www.certistar.com), a company on a mission to make the dining out experiences safer and easier the millions of people impacted with food allergies.



Food Allergy Research and Education estimates 32 million (one in 10 adults)

Americans have food allergies. A food allergy or intolerance occurs when the body's immune system reacts unusually to specific foods and oftentimes, it's difficult to know what food is causing it. Environmental allergies are very easy to identify with scratch or prick tests. Many allergists will perform the same test for a common set of food allergens, and there is also a bevy of at-home tests to consider as well. But are the results actually something you can count on? Here are key things to keep in mind when working with your allergist to figure out what foods you may be allergic to.

1. Find a specialist

You want to absolutely make sure that your allergist specializes in food allergies. They're quite different from environmental allergies in how the body reacts, how testing should work and treatment. Read their online bios or ask the receptionists questions to be sure you are winding up with someone who has the right specialty.

2. Keep track of foods

You may have some foods in mind that are causing issues or reactions. Be sure to mention those to your doctor and focus any testing on the foods that are suspected so the testing can be narrowed down using information you already know. Over 170 foods (foods outside of the popular top eight must not be discounted) have caused food allergic reactions and no one wants to have that many scratches or pricks!

3. Come prepared

Many foods do not have a test available, but some doctors will have you bring the actual food with you to extract a sample to be used for a test. Be sure to ask ahead of time if they have a test for the suspected allergen.

4. Be aware of false positives

If you've tested positive for a wide variety of foods but you are still eating them regularly without issues, strongly question whether they are foods you really need to avoid. Also ask about Oral Food Challenges (that feed you the suspected food in measured doses) for those foods that you are testing positive to but do not appear to have any issues actually consuming.

5. Prepare for the worst

Be sure to ask for a prescription for an epinephrine auto injector. Even if you've never needed one, it is far preferable to have it and never need it to the alternative.

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