

Bogus allergy tests causing real harm

Level 3 • Advanced

1 Warmer

Are you allergic to any of the following or do you know someone who is?

- certain types of food
 - nuts, shellfish, wheat, eggs, milk, seeds, fruit and vegetables ...
- dust
- wasp or bee stings
- animals
- pollen
- latex
- certain medicines

What happens if you – or they – are exposed to the allergen(s)?

2 Key words

Fill the gaps in the sentences using these key words from the text.

allergy
bogus

intolerance
eczema

anaphylaxis
bloated

acupuncture
lethargy

homeopathy
malnutrition

1. If something is _____, it is not real, although it pretends to be real.
2. An _____ is a medical condition in which you become sick or your skin becomes covered with red marks as a reaction to something you eat, breathe or touch.
3. _____ is a medical condition in which you are weak or ill because you do not eat enough or you do not eat enough of the right foods.
4. A food _____ is a digestive reaction to something that you eat that makes you feel uncomfortable but is not as serious as an allergy.
5. _____ is a very serious allergic reaction to something and can, in some cases, be fatal.
6. If you feel _____, you have an uncomfortable feeling in your stomach after eating or drinking a certain thing or eating or drinking too much.
7. _____ is a medical treatment originating in China that involves putting special needles into particular parts of the body.
8. _____ is a way of treating illness by giving small amounts of natural substances that, in large amounts, would cause that illness.
9. _____ is a feeling that you lack energy and do not want to do anything.
10. _____ is a medical condition that makes your skin dry, sore and itchy.

3 Find the information

Find the following information in the text as quickly as possible.

1. What is IgG?
2. What is the Cochrane Centre?
3. What is Sense About Science?
4. Which two allergic conditions among children have trebled in the last 30 years?

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Bogus allergy tests causing real harm, say experts

Misdiagnoses leading to unnecessary treatments and poor diets, sometimes causing malnutrition, says charity Sense About Science

Sarah Boseley, health editor

4 June, 2015

- 1 Bogus allergy tests are convincing thousands of people to take unnecessary treatments and put themselves or their children on inadequate diets, sometimes resulting in malnutrition, a group of experts and charities has said. Allergies and food intolerances are soaring but confusion between the two, as well as the many misdiagnoses, are causing real harm, said the information organization Sense About Science, which has produced a guide in collaboration with allergy specialists and charities.
- 2 "It's probably the biggest mess for science communication, where myths, misinterpreted studies and quackery collide with under- and over-diagnosis," said Tracey Brown, director of Sense About Science. "The costs are huge – unnecessary actions for some and not enough action for those whose lives depend on it."
- 3 Experts fear that restaurants and caterers are seeing so many people claiming they have allergies (which can be dangerous for the individual), when in fact they have a food intolerance (which is not), that they may not take all the precautions they should when serving a person who has a genuine allergy.
- 4 "It matters very much," said Moira Austin of the Anaphylaxis Campaign. "If a caterer thinks somebody is just avoiding a food because they don't want to get bloated, they may be less careful. There have been a number of fatalities where people have gone to a restaurant and alerted staff that they have an allergy to a particular food and the meal has been served up containing that allergen."
- 5 The guide says most internet and shop-bought allergy tests have no scientific basis. They include a home-testing kit that looks for specific IgG (immunoglobulin G) antibodies against food stuffs in the blood. While these antibodies are part of the immune system's response to infections, "the best medical evidence has shown elevated IgG levels do not suggest an allergy", the guide says. "Results are frequently positive in individuals who do not have an allergy or a food intolerance."
- 6 Also debunked is a test, a mixture of acupuncture and homeopathy, which attempts to measure electronic resistance across the skin while the child or adult holds the suspect food in their hand. Hair follicle testing is also pointless, the guide says. "Hair is not involved in allergic reactions so testing hair samples cannot provide any useful information on allergic status." Nor should people be deceived into thinking allergies are caused by an "energy blockage" that can be diagnosed by muscle testing and cured by acupuncture.
- 7 "I commonly see children who've been put on to unnecessarily restricted diets because their parents assume, in good faith, that they have allergies to multiple foods on the basis of 'allergy tests' that have no scientific basis," said Paul Seddon, a consultant paediatric allergist, on behalf of the UK Cochrane Centre, an independent organization that assesses medical evidence. "This needs to stop, which can only happen if we debunk these 'tests'."
- 8 Another consultant paediatric allergist, Adam Fox from Guys and St Thomas' Hospital in London, said: "I get a number of patients, and my colleagues likewise, who will come in having sent their hair off for analysis or having excluded a whole range of foods for their children. It is very difficult to untangle that. There are two challenges. Children need to be given proper diets but more of it is the unnecessary avoidance of things that aren't harmful, which has a huge impact on the quality of life. A child who can't eat wheat or drink milk can't go to parties."
- 9 The conviction that a child's chronic lethargy or headaches or eczema are caused by an allergy takes a long time and many tests to prove or disprove. It is tempting to go to an alternative therapist who will do a single test and provide a quick, but inaccurate, answer.
- 10 Allergies are on the rise across developed countries. The percentages of children diagnosed with allergic rhinitis and eczema have both trebled in the last 30 years. While there

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is now better diagnosis, the rise in incidence is real, leading many more people to suspect allergies are the reason for their own or their children's health issues. The guide lists a number of myths about the sources of allergies, from the suggestion that they are caused by E

numbers in food colourings to "toxic overload" and fast food.

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4 Comprehension check

Choose the best answer according to the text.

1. What is the difference between a food allergy and food intolerance?
 - a. A food allergy is something that is often detected by bogus food allergy tests.
 - b. The former is serious and the latter is not.
 - c. People can die from food intolerance.
2. What is the problem with most internet and shop-bought allergy tests?
 - a. They do not find what they are looking for.
 - b. They only detect food intolerance and not food allergies.
 - c. They have no scientific basis.
3. Why is hair follicle testing pointless when it comes to testing for food allergies?
 - a. Hair is not involved in allergic reactions.
 - b. Hair does not provide a large enough sample to make a reliable diagnosis.
 - c. Bald people cannot benefit from such tests.
4. What do E numbers in food colourings and fast food have in common?
 - a. They are both myths.
 - b. They do not cause allergies.
 - c. They cause allergic rhinitis and eczema.

5 Find the word

Find the following words and phrases in the text.

1. an adjective meaning *not enough or not good enough for a particular purpose* (para 1)
2. a verb meaning *quickly increase to a high level* (para 1)
3. a noun meaning *an incorrect medical decision about what illness a particular person has* (para 1)
4. a noun meaning *bad medical treatment from doctors who are not good at their job or from people who cheat other people by pretending to be medical experts* (para 2)
5. a noun meaning *a person or business that organizes the food and drinks at an event such as a party or meeting* (para 3)
6. a verb meaning *prove that something such as an idea or belief is false and silly* (para 6)
7. a three-word phrase meaning *with the intention of behaving in an honest and sincere way* (para 7)
8. an adjective meaning *relating to the part of medicine dealing with children and their diseases* (para 7)

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6 Verb + noun collocations

Match the verbs in the left-hand column with the nouns or noun phrases in the right-hand column.

- | | |
|-------------|------------------------|
| 1. take | a. an impact |
| 2. cause | b. (someone) on a diet |
| 3. provide | c. harm |
| 4. have | d. a conviction |
| 5. disprove | e. precautions |
| 6. put | f. information |

7 Word-building

Fill the gaps in the sentences with the correct form of the word in brackets at the end of each sentence.

- Some children have been put on _____ restricted diets because their parents believe they have allergies to multiple foods. [NECESSARY]
- There have been a number of _____ where people have told restaurant staff they are allergic to a particular food and have been served a meal containing that allergen. [FATAL]
- The unnecessary _____ of things that are not harmful has a huge impact on the quality of life. [AVOID]
- Sense About Science has produced a guide in _____ with allergy specialists and charities. [COLLABORATE]
- One test attempts to measure electronic _____ across the skin. [RESIST]
- Some people believe falsely that allergies are caused by E numbers in food _____. [COLOUR]

8 Discussion

- Most people have allergies or intolerances to certain foods. Many just might not be aware of it.
- The huge increase in allergies is caused by environmental factors such as pollution.
- All restaurants and food providers should be required by law to list all the ingredients in their products.

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KEY

2 Key words

1. bogus
2. allergy
3. malnutrition
4. intolerance
5. anaphylaxis
6. bloated
7. acupuncture
8. homeopathy
9. lethargy
10. eczema

3 Find the information

1. Immunoglobulin G
2. an independent organization that assesses medical evidence
3. a charity; an information organization
4. rhinitis and eczema

4 Comprehension check

1. b
2. c
3. a
4. b

5 Find the word

1. inadequate
2. soar
3. misdiagnosis
4. quackery
5. caterer
6. debunk
7. in good faith
8. paediatric

6 Verb + noun collocations

1. e
2. c
3. f
4. a
5. d
6. b

7 Word-building

1. unnecessarily; unnecessary
2. fatalities
3. avoidance
4. collaboration
5. resistance
6. colourings; colouring