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# DELICIOUS!

YOUR MAGAZINE OF NATURAL LIVING

## How to Win at Losing Weight

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**If you've tried to lose weight without success, consider the possibility of hidden food allergies. Many people find that eliminating allergens from their diet is the missing link to weight loss, and new research is starting to reveal why.**

**By Melissa Diane Smith**

**T**en years ago I was overweight and plagued by fatigue, achy joints, sore throats and digestive upsets. My excess pounds concerned me the most, so I tried to restrict my calories and eat what I thought were healthy foods. However, the more I tried to lose, the heavier and weaker I became. I eventually felt so sick and exhausted I gave up on weight loss.

Out of desperation I went on an elimination diet that was free of the seven most common food allergens: cow's milk, wheat, corn, yeast, sugar, soy and eggs. To my amazement, many of my uncomfortable symptoms went away or lessened, but something else even more unexpected and remarkable happened: I started losing weight! I could hardly believe this, so I continued to experiment with my diet. In time I discovered other foods besides the original seven that caused adverse symptoms and found that avoiding my specific allergens did in fact have a huge impact on my weight, not to mention my well-being.

As long as I avoided my food allergens, the excess pounds steadily fell off me, even though I was eating significantly more calories than I had when I was dieting! I was shocked by this discovery, but incredibly motivated to stick with this way of eating. As difficult as it was to steer clear of my many food allergens, I did, and within six months, I lost 30 pounds and regained my figure, going from a size 13 to a size 6.

My story was dramatic but I assumed it was an isolated incident. Not so, says James Braly, M.D., author of *Dr. Braly's Food Allergy and Nutrition Revolution* (Keats). In 15 years of clinical practice, food allergy specialist Braly says he's seen thousands of people lose weight simply by identifying and eliminating their hidden food allergens. To understand why, you first need to know more about food allergies.

Simply put, food allergies are adverse immunological responses and symptomatic reactions to foods that other people eat without harm. Immediately obvious allergic reactions such as a person's throat tightening up shortly after eating peanuts involve the release of immunoglobulin E (IgE) antibodies. These types of reactions are the ones most people associate with food allergies, but they account for only 5 percent of adverse reactions to food. The vast majority are hidden or delayed in their nature,

producing symptoms from 2 to 72 hours after eating the problem food, Braly says. These types of reactions are called delayed-onset food allergies, which involve the release of different antibodies, especially immunoglobulin G (IgG) antibodies. They can cause or provoke more than 50 medical conditions and hundreds of symptoms, and they're estimated to affect about 60 percent of the American population, according to Braly.

Frequently undiagnosed by conventional allergists, delayed-onset food allergies are a major reason why millions of Americans go through life with chronic complaints that are never effectively treated, Braly says. (See "Do You Have Food Allergies?" on page 37.)

## **How Allergies Cause Weight Gain**

Researchers believe delayed-onset food allergies can contribute to weight problems in several different ways. First, they can cause water retention and water weight gain, Braly says. In virtually all hidden food-allergy cases, partially digested food compounds pass through a compromised intestinal lining into the bloodstream and eventually travel to tissues, where they cause irritation and inflammation. The body tries to reduce this irritation by retaining water, which dilutes the concentration of the offending material. As long as people consistently eat food allergens, they often hold on to water weight, Braly explains.

Inflammatory substances released during allergic reactions to food also affect weight control. Some chemicals involved in food allergies may inhibit metabolism, and prostaglandin E2, which is also released, inhibits the body's ability to burn fat stores, according to Braly. Food allergies may therefore diminish the body's ability to burn fat, a process known as lipolysis. Food allergies often lead to food addictions, which further sabotage weight control in a variety of ways. One study found that partially digested compounds in common food allergens act like morphine-like opioid drugs (*Lancet*, Oct. 27, 1979). This means that eating food allergens creates a temporary "high," but when that feeling wears off, we crave our allergens again to get another euphoric "fix." Eventually we eat our food allergens so often that we become physiologically and psychologically addicted. If we try to eat less of the foods we're addicted to (as we usually do when we restrict calories), that's like asking an alcoholic to have one small glass of alcohol a day, Braly says. We often develop such uncontrollable cravings for our favorite foods that we end up bingeing on them. Binge-eating, in turn, encourages weight gain.

New research suggests the opioid chemicals found in partially digested food allergens also may increase appetite and decrease metabolism when produced in excess (*New England Journal of Medicine*, 1997, vol. 337). If this is true, the more we eat food allergens, the more likely we'll overeat, Braly says. Even if we use willpower to ignore our increased appetite and eat fewer calories, we still might gain weight if we continue to consume our food allergens. That's because the body's calorie-burning efficiency could be diminished, and when excess calories aren't burned off, they're stored as fat.

Eliminating food allergens can therefore conceivably offer many benefits: It can alleviate bloating and water retention, help overcome food cravings

### **Food Allergies Could Be Key to a Weight Problem if...**

- You're overweight and also have symptoms that could be attributed to food allergies.
- You retain a lot of water and tend to gain several pounds in a day or two.
- You've had trouble losing weight by restricting calories or exercising.
- You've lost weight on diets but have been unable to lose past a certain point.
- You have abnormal food cravings and engage in binge-eating.

*Source: Dr. Braly's Food Allergy and Nutrition Revolution (Keats) by James Braly, M.D.*



## Win at Losing Weight

and addictions, and boost metabolism and fat-burning lipolysis in some people, Braly believes. These benefits are the only explanations Braly can offer for the effortless and miraculous weight loss he's seen in patients. "Literally thousands of my patients eliminated their food allergens, started eating a varied, nonallergenic diet, and never counted calories -- yet the fat seemed to melt off them," he explains. He estimates 80 to 90 percent of his patients who needed to lose weight were able to do so when they identified and eliminated their food allergens.

## Weight-Loss Success Stories

The following are a few examples of weight-loss successes that have occurred using the food-allergen elimination approach.

- Sharon Heath, a 50-year-old administrative assistant, never considered herself overweight but was baffled by how she could gain 10 pounds in one weekend. Although she didn't understand what caused her fluctuating weight, she learned to live with it by buying clothes that could be adjusted depending on whether she

was bloated or not. When digestive troubles prompted her to identify and remove food allergens from her diet, she lost eight pounds of water weight in the first four days and 22 pounds altogether. Her once puffy waist dropped from 33 inches to 25.

- Ferdie Massimino, a triathlete, had a grueling workout schedule of cycling, running, swimming and weightlifting. No matter what he tried, he couldn't lose excess body fat to ensure peak athletic performance. When Massimino identified and avoided his food allergens, he lost 25 pounds and reached top form, despite significantly increasing the amount of calories he consumed.

- Ute Isbill, a 38-year-old attorney, experienced strong food cravings all her life and had been overweight for more than 10 years. She tried eliminating food allergens because of severe migraines, and when she did, her cravings (and migraines) vanished and she easily lost weight. Once 170 pounds and a size 16, Isbill is now 140 pounds and a size 8.

## Get Rid of Allergens

Keep in mind that many factors can contribute to overweight conditions. Eliminating food allergens doesn't stimulate weight loss in everybody, but it works for many people, Braly says. If you've had trouble losing weight and also have symptoms that could be caused from food allergies, there's no reason not to try this approach. For the best chances of success, follow these suggestions offered by Braly:

1. **Identify the foods you're allergic to by having an IgG ELISA (the abbreviation for enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay) blood test performed.** Food allergens vary dramatically from person to person and need to be determined on an individual basis. Although some people can determine food allergens by following elimination-and-challenge diets (eliminating common allergens for a period of time, then adding them back again and watching for adverse symptoms), this method of detection is difficult, time-consuming and often inaccurate. Most people have delayed reactions to several food allergens, and an IgG ELISA test is the most accurate way to detect these types of allergies.

2. **Once your food allergens are identified, completely**

**eliminate them from your diet for at least three months.** This is more difficult than it sounds because common allergens are hidden in many foods. The best way around this is to eat as many natural, unprocessed foods as possible. If you buy many convenience foods or eat out often, consult a nutritionist to learn how to steer clear of hidden forms of food allergens.

3. **Stay motivated to avoid allergens by retraining yourself about how you think about food.** The key concept to remember is no matter how healthy a food may be, it's not healthy for you if your body allergically reacts to it. Remind yourself that health and weight control are diminished when you eat your food allergens.

4. **Eat a varied diet, preferably a rotation diet, in which you eat the same nonallergenic food no more than once every three to four days.** Food-allergic people are prone to developing new food allergies and addictions, which ultimately lead to more weight and health problems. To prevent this from happening, rotate foods as much as possible. If you have trouble planning your diet, get assistance from a food-allergy specialist.

## Treating Food Allergies

Eating a varied, nonallergenic diet may help you lose weight, but it doesn't usually resolve the reasons you developed food allergies. To overcome them and experience better health, consult a wholistic-oriented doctor or allergist who can determine the underlying causes of your allergies, Braly says.

Common causes of food allergies include poor digestion, nutrient deficiencies, a limited or highly processed diet and, most frequently, leaky gut syndrome -- excessive permeability of the digestive tract which allows food allergens to enter the bloodstream. Leaky gut syndrome, in turn, can be brought on by a wide variety of factors including alcohol consumption, the use of nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (such as aspirin, ibuprofen and acetaminophen), and assorted viral, bacterial, parasitic and yeast infections.

Once the underlying causes of food allergies are determined, you can often correct or improve them with lifestyle changes and the use of supplements. Avoid alcohol consumption, limit your exposure to chemicals, emphasize eating organic foods, and find natural alternatives such as ginger to anti-inflammatory drugs, Braly says.

Supplements also are critical for treatment, Braly says. Work with your doctor and experiment to determine which supplements might be appropriate in your situation.

- The flavonoid **quercetin** and the amino acid **glutamine** help eliminate or diminish allergies in many food-allergic people. Quercetin acts as an antiallergy, anti-

### Do You Have Food Allergies?

Food allergies can cause a wide range of symptoms, depending on the individual. Here are the most common indicators:

- Mental or physical fatigue, particularly after meals, upon awakening in the morning, or in association with other allergy symptoms such as depression or gastrointestinal disorders.
- Water retention or edema or a tendency to gain or lose more than a couple of pounds a day.
- Puffiness, swelling or dark bags under the eyes.
- Excess mucus formation characterized by a chronically congested nose, postnasal drip, a runny nose, sneezing fits or excessive phlegm.
- Digestive disturbances including bloating after meals, flatulence, constipation alternating with diarrhea, nausea, or abdominal pains or cramps.
- Chronic pain that manifests in the form of rheumatoid arthritis, muscle aches and pains, or sore, achy joints.
- Frequent headaches, especially cluster and migraine headaches.
- Emotional, mental and behavioral symptoms such as mood swings, irritability for no apparent reason, panic attacks, hyperactivity, inability to concentrate and inexplicable depression.

Source: Dr. Braly's Food Allergy and Nutrition Revolution (*Keats*) by James Braly, M.D.



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inflammatory agent, and glutamine helps restore intestinal membrane integrity in cases of leaky gut syndrome.

- **Vitamin C** and **bioflavonoids** prevent allergic reactions and help you overcome symptoms of allergic withdrawal.

- **Vitamin A** and **zinc** keep mucous membranes healthy and are needed to produce secretory IgA, an antibody that protects the body from food allergens.

- **Ginger** and broad-spectrum **proteolytic enzymes** often help poor digestion, a common cause of food allergies. Ginger is a digestive tonic herb with anti-inflammatory properties; proteolytic enzymes help in cases of digestive enzyme deficiencies.

- When food allergies are caused by an underlying intestinal infection such as candidi-

asis, **probiotics** such as *Lactobacillus acidophilus* and *Lactobacillus bifidus* can be used. These increase the beneficial bacteria needed to restore healthy digestion.

If you adopt a comprehensive approach to improving your health, you should be able to overcome food allergies and eventually eat most of the foods you were once allergic to. Some people find they must continue to avoid certain foods, but most are able to add former allergens to their diets after several months without adverse effects, Braly says. To determine when to return foods to your diet, discuss your condition with your doctor.

Once you reintroduce former food allergens into your diet, you must eat them on an infrequent or rotating basis. If you don't -- if you eat them over and over -- you'll likely redevelop food allergies and rapidly regain the weight you lost by avoiding them, Braly says.

Millions of Americans go on one type of diet

or another at this time of year to try to lose weight. Food allergies may explain why some of those diets work so well for some people but cause weight gain in others. "I think a lot of people who lose weight when they change diets lose weight because they unknowingly eliminate allergenic foods," Braly says. "How your body perceives and responds to the foods you eat is at least as important as the calories you take in." While weight control is a complex issue, many factors play a part. Eliminating hidden food allergens is not the only answer to weight control, Braly says. But it's often an overlooked piece of the puzzle. ■

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*Melissa Diane Smith is a health journalist and nutritional consultant from Tucson, Ariz. For more information about food-allergy testing and the IgG ELISA blood test, call Immuno Laboratories at 1-800-231-9197.*