

Allergy and Food Intolerance Screening Information Sheet

What are Allergies?

The term allergy is used to describe a reaction to substance within the body which triggers an immune response and then a more excessive reaction, which is typically inherited. The substances which cause this response are known as allergens. The body mistakes allergens to be damaging, therefore producing antibodies to attack it. After this first happens, next time that person comes into contact with the same substance their body releases further chemicals which trigger the symptoms of an allergic reaction. These symptoms can be relatively mild or severe (anaphylaxis).

Inhaled Allergies – Inhaled allergies are triggered when allergen is breathed in. Substances that commonly cause these types of reactions include house dust mites, pollen, mould or cat/dog skin. Many of these allergens depend on conditions surrounding them such as time of year (e.g. types of pollen), specific places (e.g. outdoor for pollen and indoor for dust mites) or temperature (e.g. dust mites are found at much higher levels in colder climates).

Food Allergies-Food allergies are triggered when a specific food is eaten. Substances that commonly trigger food allergies include milk, eggs, nuts, wheat or shellfish. If someone is allergic to one of these substances and they eat some of the trigger food, the reaction tends to be swift and symptoms start to show almost immediately.

Treatment – If an allergy has been identified, the main treatment is to try and avoid the allergen, or reduce exposure to it if it is not possible to avoid it all together. For example, a food based allergy can be treated by the avoidance of that particular food, an allergy to mould can be treated by

uncovering the source of the mould and getting rid of it however a pollen based allergy is likely to reappear every year, probably during Spring or Summer.

Treatment may also include drugs which can reduce the allergy symptoms. These treatments are unlikely to be effective if no effort is made, where possible, to reduce exposure to allergens.

What are Food Intolerances?

A food intolerance occurs when a person eats too much of a certain food that the body cannot handle. This is because the digestive system is unable to produce sufficient quantities of a specific enzyme which is needed to break down the food. Generally, someone who is intolerant to a specific food is able to tolerate a certain amount of this food however will suffer symptoms if too much is eaten or if it is eaten too often.

Intolerances are much more common than allergies. Usually the onset of symptoms are much slower and may be delayed hours after the food was eaten. They will last till the food has left the body, however this is different when a person unknowingly eats the same food regularly as it leads to the development of almost continual symptoms with no clear immediate reaction each time the food is eaten.

The symptoms caused by food intolerances are much more varied than allergies; someone with an intolerance will often experience more than one. Some symptoms include: Asthma, Rhinitis (nasal allergy), abdominal pain, diarrhoea, irritable bowel syndrome, eczema or headaches.

Treatment – If it is suspected that a customer has a food intolerance, this can be treated by eliminating the trigger food from their diet and then eating the food to see if the symptoms

come back. This is known as an elimination and challenge diet. However certain people should not partake in this diet if the symptoms they are receiving include for example severe asthma, eczema or swelling.

Diagnosis of Allergies and Food Intolerances

Allergies and food intolerances are indicated through a range of symptoms. To begin with the diagnosis a thorough exploration of these symptoms is required with the customer, including how they were experienced, as well as what factors, if any, had an impact on them. Any previous experiences/ family history may also increase the risk of the customer having an allergy. This information allows the pharmacist to make a decision as to what test to be useful for the customer. Testing may be used to establish which specific allergen is at work.

Why offer an Allergy and Food Intolerance Screening Service?

Allergies affect many thousands of people very year in the UK, with 2% of the population having a life threatening allergy. According to Allergy UK, 33% of the population will visit their doctor or pharmacist at some point due to an allergy, with this number increasing by around 5% every year. As well as this food intolerance is much more common than having an allergy, with typically more symptoms too. Despite these worrying trends, treatment for both has been described by Allergy UK as "limited and patchy". Around 12 million people a year will receive treatment however as the majority gain diagnosis and treatment from GP's, many are left undiagnosed or with poorly controlled symptoms due to their lack of training in the field. An allergy screening process not only will help reduce the amount of people visiting GP's each year , but will also eventually save the NHS large amounts of money in the near future.

1. I consent to having a finger prick sample of blood taken to test for allergies or food intolerances	
2. I consent to the information being provided in this form being accessed and stored on a computer and in manual files, together with any test results or other information about me relating to this service	
Customer signature	Date