

DRAFT

Mini-Review – Naturopathic Medicine Concepts

Dietary Allergies

(Disclaimer: This mini-review is intended to explain this naturopathic concept to allopathic clinicians and not to present a detailed review of the evidence. Some key references are provided for the reader who desires more in-depth information. It is also not intended to serve as medical advice).

Theory

There is widespread agreement among naturopathic physicians that food allergies and intolerance play a role in the etiology of many diseases. There is scientific evidence to support this belief for several diseases, including irritable bowel syndrome, atopic dermatitis, asthma, migraine headaches, chronic sinusitis, and others. One common theory about the mechanism of how food allergies and intolerance cause disease is commonly termed “leaky gut syndrome.” When a person ingests food they are allergic or intolerant to, this causes a local inflammatory reaction in the gastrointestinal tract. The inflammatory reaction results in production of inflammatory cytokines and increased permeability of the gut mucosa, allowing molecules of food large enough to act as antigens to cross the gut mucosa. When these antigens are recognized by the immune system, antibodies are produced. These antibodies can then cause allergic reactions in different tissues and sites, such as skin, respiratory tract, gastrointestinal tract, circulatory system, etc.

These food allergies and intolerances are not thought to be primarily IgE related. IgE is the antibody thought to be responsible for severe and anaphylactic allergic reactions. More commonly, IgG4 antibodies are suspected as the causative antibody in food allergies.

Testing for food allergies or intolerance is varied. The testing method generally regarded as the most accurate and reliable is the food elimination/challenge diet, where a patient eliminates the suspect foods for a period of time, then reintroduces them one at a time to test for reactions. Other testing methods that are generally considered less reliable include serum IgE/IgG4 antibody testing and skin prick testing. Electrodermal skin testing and kinesiology testing are sometimes used, but are unproven.

Practical Application

If a naturopathic physician suspects that a patient may have food allergies or intolerance as one of the underlying causes of a condition, they will likely recommend the patient undergo some form of food allergy/intolerance testing. Food elimination challenge and IgG4 serum testing are the most common methods used. If food allergies or intolerance are identified, the patient will be asked to eliminate that food from their diets for a period of time, usually at least 6 months. After that period of time, some patients can

reintroduce the food on a limited or rotation basis without reacting to it. Other patients may have to avoid the food permanently. In addition, during the time of elimination of identified offending foods, the naturopathic physician will likely recommend supplementation to reduce gut inflammation and restore optimal flora to the GI tract, which may have been disrupted. Lactobacillus species supplements, and nutritional anti-inflammatory supplements such as fish oil, glutamine, and botanical medicines would commonly be recommended.

Key References

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