

Understanding Food Allergy Lab Tests

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Unlike straightforward tests like pregnancy tests, food allergy tests are complex and subjective. They need to be interpreted in context, much like an abstract painting. The most important part is taking the patient's history into account in conjunction with lab work and skin testing.

Types of Food Reactions

Classical Allergies: Positive IgE tests (allergic antibodies) indicate potential for severe reactions like anaphylaxis, which includes symptoms such as hives, vomiting, and difficulty breathing.

Oral Allergy Syndrome: Caused by cross-reactions between pollen proteins and certain fruits and vegetables, leading to mild symptoms like an itchy mouth and throat.

Food Intolerances: These are adverse effects without a confirmatory test. Common examples include lactose or gluten intolerance, different from milk and wheat allergies and celiac disease.

Interpreting Allergy Tests

Allergy tests must be read alongside the patient's history. Just as an orchestra needs all its instruments, the immune system's full picture requires consideration beyond specific IgE levels. Lab work is not typically done and should NOT be done for foods already being consumed without issues. If needed, a food challenge in a controlled setting can be performed to confirm allergies.

Valid vs. Invalid Tests

Valid tests measure specific IgE for foods. Alternative tests, like those for IgG antibodies, lack scientific backing and are not covered by insurance. We do not use or recommend these tests.

Risks of Altering Diet Based on Tests

Removing a food based on a positive test result may result in severe allergic reactions when it is reintroduced some time later. Our immune systems have figured out a way to develop tolerance for that food and if you remove it from the diet, that person may become sensitized and react to it. It also is a psychological and social burden for the adult or child restricting their diet. Avoid unnecessary dietary changes based solely on test results.

Test Results and Risk Assessment

Allergy test results show likelihood, not severity. High or low IgE levels do not directly correlate with reaction severity. Risk depends on various factors, including past history and current health conditions. Children with eczema and other atopic conditions frequently have very high levels of total IgE and may test positive for virtually any food for which they are tested. For high-risk foods like peanuts, always carry epinephrine, which is the antidote for a severe allergic reaction of any cause.

Testing Protocol

We only order tests after evaluating the patient and do not repeat them annually unless necessary. Avoid indiscriminate testing; it can cause unnecessary anxiety.

Receiving and Discussing Results

Lab results are sent via the patient portal. For a thorough discussion of results, treatment options, and to address concerns, schedule a telemedicine or in-person visit. This ensures a comprehensive understanding and appropriate care plan.

Our goal is to minimize stress and maximize clarity through detailed discussions and tailored treatment plans.