

What's wrong with apple juice?

...or apples, or oranges, or tangerines, or grapes, or raisins, or tomatoes, or peaches, or nectarines, or cucumbers, or almonds, or peppers?

Actually, nothing is wrong with these foods; they're wholesome and nourishing. But for someone who is "salicylate sensitive" certain foods can be terrific troublemakers.

Salicylates occur naturally in some plants, and are also found in medicines. Aspirin is the best known salicylate, and aspirin-sensitivity is widely recognized; it can bring on a variety of symptoms from asthmatic attacks to hives to excessive bruising.



For many years medical journals have carried reports of adverse reactions to a variety of different substances including foods, food additives and medicines. Much of the information came from allergists who observed physical symptoms resulting from sensitivity to foods or aspirin or food additives like dyes. Then research at the Kaiser-Permanente Medical Center in San Francisco demonstrated a link between these different substances – they're like cousins!

Even more surprising was the discovery that reactions can take the form of changes in behavior or in the ability to focus. The same food or chemical which can bring about a case of hives in one patient can result in distractibility for another, and unprovoked anger in a third. In other words, substances that cause a reaction in one organ – our skin – can also affect another organ – our brain.



What is there in an apple that is similar to a food dye or an aspirin tablet? Too little is known about salicylate-sensitivity to provide a definite answer, but we know that some plants produce chemicals to repel threats like insects and plant diseases, and that this chemical is similar to "acetylsalicylic acid," i.e., aspirin.

Research has been conducted to measure the salicylate content of various foods, but we don't know for sure that it's actually the salicylate that triggers a reaction. To further complicate the issue, a person can be extremely sensitive to one or two of the salicylate foods, and be able to tolerate the rest. Or they might be able to handle a food raw but not cooked, or the reverse.



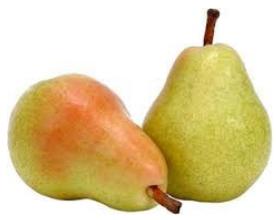
Why would anyone be unable to tolerate something healthy like an apple, even an organic apple? It might be related to the changes in our food supply. We are missing many important nutrients when we rely on highly processed foods. Unlike our ancestors, we don't preserve our food through fermentation, so our diets are no longer rich in probiotics.

New research suggests that the key to a healthy body is good gut health, which means a steady supply of high quality probiotics (not processed yogurt loaded with additives). Antibiotics pose a major challenge to maintaining a healthy gut; they destroy beneficial bacteria. But even people who do not take antibiotic medicine ingest them when they eat factory-raised meats from animals that are treated with antibiotics. These drugs are used to damage the animal's metabolism, which fattens them up quickly, thus increasing profits.



Then consider the lack of nutrients in modern food and the thousands of synthetic chemicals in our food, air, water, cosmetics and household products, and it's easy to see why our overworked bodies are having a hard time coping. This could help explain why some have found that those delicious fruits are not their friends.

The good news is that even if you are unable to handle some of the salicylate foods, there are many “non-salicylates” that are well-tolerated. What's more, by temporarily avoiding the culprits, you might be able to add them back later on. The nonprofit Feingold Association shows how to determine if you have a salicylate-sensitivity, which foods are most likely to be well-tolerated, and the way many people have been able to reduce or overcome their sensitivities. See www.feingold.org



Happily, there are many vegetables and there is a good selection of fruits that are well tolerated by salicylate-sensitive people.