

## **A Matter of FACT**

### **Emma Wells, nutritional therapist explores the comprehensive diagnostic potential of the new FACTest**

With so many different types of tests to choose from when considering food allergy and intolerance it can be a confusing job trying to decide which test is right for you. A relatively new test offered by a recognised medical laboratory Individual Wellbeing Diagnostic Laboratory (IWDL) just made the choice a little easier.

The FACT test was developed by Nigel Abrahams Immunologist and Scientific Director of IWDL. As an immunologist he recognized the lack of reliable tests that took into account the large number of patients with allergy symptoms that produced negative results with traditional antibody laboratory tests, he also recognized that allergy related symptoms are not only caused by immune reactions involving antibodies alone but that they can involve other cellular responses. In fact the beauty of the FACTest rests in its ability to look for these chemical mediators that are released when an allergic reaction or intolerance takes place and not as most tests do just the antibodies that are involved.

#### **The science**

In a normal allergic or intolerance type reaction the body responds to an offending food or allergen by making a specific antibody to it. An IgE antibody, commonly associated with inhalants like dust mite, or food cause instant reactions and can in more severe cases result in anaphylactic shock. The body also makes an IgG antibody more commonly associated with a food intolerance and delayed reactions.

In both cases the actual symptoms are caused by chemicals that are released from a mast cell that attaches to the antibody when it meets with the offending food. This coupling causes the release of chemicals; histamine, cytokines and leukotrienes and it is these chemicals that are responsible for the symptoms experienced with an allergic type reaction.

Professor A De Weck who is one of the foremost authorities on cellular allergy responses says that "it is the release of mediators of an allergic reaction, and not merely the presence of specific serum IgE, that is responsible for the clinical manifestation of an allergy." Recent research backs this up and shows that a mast cell may independently attach to an offending allergen without an antibody being involved and still release these chemicals and this is the advantage that the FACTest has over many other types of allergy and intolerance testing.

#### **Measuring up**

The once recognised gold standard of allergy testing relied on a hospital visit and exposing an individual to the offending allergen and inducing a reaction, sometimes causing anaphylactic shock, thankfully for obvious reasons not something the NHS really likes to do anymore, the next best thing is an invasive test called a colonoscopic allergen provocation test (COLAP), the gut mucosa is challenged with some potential foods to invoke a reaction. IgE and IgG tests don't measure up too favourably against these tests, in fact as many as 50% of IgE and skin prick tests failed to pick up that an allergic type reaction was occurring at a gut level where inflammatory markers were released.

#### **Nutritionists niche**

"There is some evidence to show that in certain cases if you are allergic or intolerant to one food you may well also react to foods of the same family, however this doesn't always follow" says Nutritional therapist Emma wells from Smart Nutrition. Emma says "That if you are having to cut

out a lot of foods from your diet caused by multiple food intolerances it is best to keep as many safe foods in the diet as possible which is why I like the FACTest as it allows me to do this.”

### **The specifics**

IWDL do a range of panels that use the FACTest process,

The complete food profile covers 200 individual foods, common seasonings, colourings, additives and drinks. Available at a cost of £220 to Allergy magazine readers

The Dairy and Grain profile measures sensitivities against all cows, sheeps, goats and Soya products, common grains and yeast. A marker called tissue transglutaminase, helpful for identifying untreated Coeliac Disease, is also measured. Available at a cost of £100.

The Additives profile checks out 24 common additives and costs £90.00 as does the analgesic and antibiotic profile which checks out 13 different drugs.

### **Going about it**

Some antibody tests can be done at home with a skin prick but the FACTest is relatively more complex and requires a larger blood sample and therefore a trip to London where the lab is based. For patients that cannot get to the lab postal kits are available and a trip to your local surgery for a blood draw is needed. All test kits come with full clear instructions and once your sample is collected you are responsible for sending the blood sample back to the laboratory within 24 hours.

### **Do's and Don'ts**

Antihistamines, steroid creams and inhalers all need to be avoided 48 hours before the test but if you have been using them for a long time its best to check this out with the lab as the test may not be suitable for you.

### **Reading you results**

Results should be with you within a week of returning your sample. You will receive a patient interpretation guide, a copy of your blood group, a detailed summary of which foods you are reacting to, a 4 day rotation diet and a handy pocket sized copy of the rotation diet to help when shopping and eating out. For most people this is all the information they need however if you feel that you would like some extra support with interpreting your results and making sure you are clear about what to do then IWDL are happy to recommend a qualified nutritional therapist in your area.

### **How to Order**

The full 200 foods FACTest is available for Allergy magazine readers at the special price of £220 (usually £245) To order call 0208 336 7750 or order online at [www.iwdl.net](http://www.iwdl.net) Quoting “Allergy magazine.”

Emma Wells can be contacted via [www.smartnutrition.co.uk](http://www.smartnutrition.co.uk) or by calling 01273 775480