



Test Your Intolerances

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A new Hong Kong company is offering kits to reveal how your diet is affecting your health

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A test that utilises a single finger prick to list all your personal food sensitivities and intolerances? We were intrigued...

Greenamics (<http://greenamics.com/>), a Hong Kong-based distributor, has recently begun selling rapid-test kits that can tell you which foods to reduce in your diet and which to cut out completely. NutriSMART was engineered in Germany, where the product was shown to be 80 per cent more accurate than

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the standard – much lengthier – food-allergy tests performed in laboratories.

Four from our Foodie office underwent testing, utilising the kits with the help of Greenamics. We varied wildly in our outlooks on our own body intolerances, with one person positive she had no intolerances whatsoever, to another who thought she possibly had a few sensitivities, to two who had been plagued for years by various dietary ailments; the latter two had both previously undertaken various elimination diets with some success. Two of us were from Western backgrounds, two from Asian, and of course we are all extremely huge foodies.



The testing kit was a little intimidating when we first opened it. Eight vials of different liquids were presented, along with a needle and a blood-collection syringe. Although quite simple once the easy-to-read instructions were perused, we'd recommend doing the test with a friend for ease, or even visiting the Greenamics office, where they will happily perform the test and provide results. Once you start, you'll need to commit to following the timing at 8–12 minute intervals or the results may not be conclusive. The whole thing takes about an hour from start to finish.



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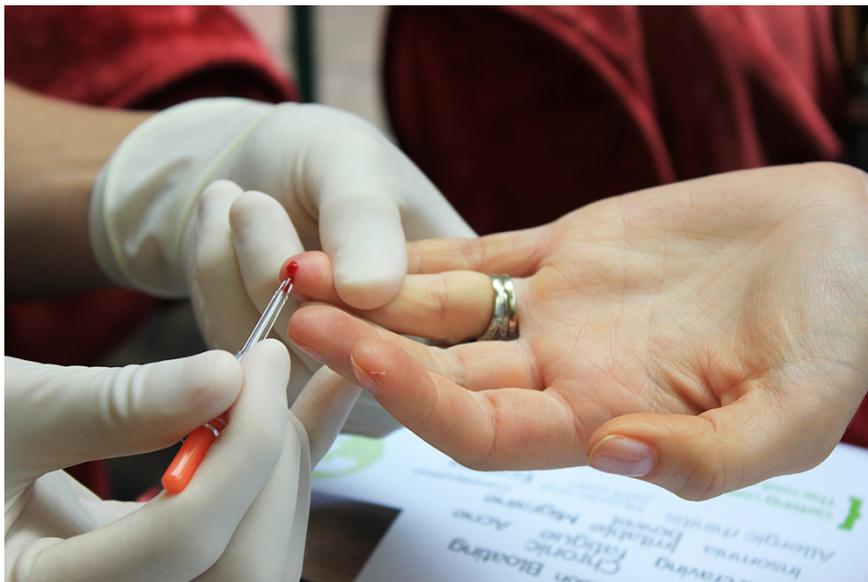
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With just a quick, sharp prick of the needle to your fingertip, a small sample of blood is transplanted into a many-windowed device, which actually looks a lot like a pregnancy test. Each numbered window in the device correlates with a different food group (there are 24 different groups ranging from milk, egg white, egg yolk and wheat to chicken, banana, lentils and almonds), along with a control bar at the top. Another bar will appear if you have a mild level sensitivity to that food and a further bar if you show a stronger level three intolerance.



There was a bit of excitement as each of our windows began popping up with varying bars, and we scurried our eyes back and forth to the corresponding list of foods to find out how we had been doing our bodies wrong all this time.

One tester was positive that she had an intolerance to cow's milk as it tastes funny to her and continually makes her feel uneasy afterwards, but the test suggested otherwise: not even a mild sensitivity was revealed. Perhaps she just doesn't like milk! Disappointingly for her, two of her favourite foods – banana and



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egg white – were shown to be massive problems for her system. She has since cut out bananas from her morning smoothies and is working at resisting the temptation of eggs altogether. We will report back on whether her body notes any positive changes over the next few months.

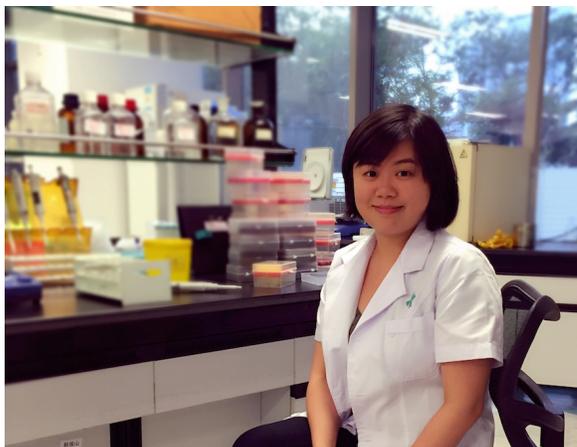
NutriSMART suggest that intolerances can be improved by cutting down (or out) on the aggravating foods for three months and then gradually reintroducing them in moderation: a sort of dietary reset button. We are keen to see how this works and if the test produces different results next season.

The tester who thought she had a myriad of intolerances was shown by her results to be correct, with about half of the intolerances coming from her already-known problem foods and the other half, sadly, from foods she consumed near daily. Her preferred breakfast of overnight oats was now out, as were the almonds she snacked on every afternoon. Most punishing perhaps was the legume mix of green beans and peas that made up most of her weekday meat-free meals. She was also extremely surprised to have no sensitivities to wheat.

Our third tester was pretty spot on with the things she shouldn't eat, primarily wheat, rye, gluten and dairy. She had previously cut out both dairy and wheat for two years and felt great, but gradually she had begun eating them again because, well, they're delicious.

Our final tester, with the belief she had absolutely no intolerances, was proven to have one after all: gluten. She assures us that she will not be making any changes to her diet anytime soon, but we wonder if subconsciously she will alter her choices ever so slightly with this new knowledge in tow.

The ailments Greenamics attribute to food intolerances range from bloating and fatigue to muscle and joint pain. We quizzed Tracy Kwong from Greenamics about the test and the results:



Are there any other testing kits like this available on the market?

In the world of food-intolerance testing, there are two types of tests: lab tests and rapid tests. The theory behind these tests is basically the same: to measure the food-specific antibodies in a blood sample that reflect your reaction to different foods. There are lab tests and rapid tests for classic allergies (e.g. finding

it difficult to breathe after eating peanuts, itchy lips after having seafood) and food intolerances (more chronic and subtle symptoms – e.g. GI discomfort, eczema, migraines – which are more common in the population). All rapid tests follow the same procedure as lab tests. That's why you have seen we need to add a few reagents into our pocket-sized device, because it runs like a mini lab.

All of these tests (no matter lab or rapid test) use the ELISA technology for antibody detection and measurements from blood samples. Eating habits (too many processed foods, additives etc) and our modern urban lifestyle (stress and chemical intake) are the key components that lead to this problem. Food intolerances can happen when we have ingested some foods too frequently, depleted the enzyme responsible for digesting some foods or have poor gut health – the partially digested foods will be detected as 'invaders' by our immune system, giving rise to an array of symptoms.

Some people may regard food intolerance as feeling 'bad' after eating certain foods. Consuming some foods too frequently could lead to food intolerances and our body could respond differently to different foods. For example, most Asians eat rice more than wheat, but the occurrence of an allergy or intolerance to rice is still much much lower than a reaction to wheat/gluten. So your reaction to a food relates to how you consume the food, but the tolerance level varies from person to person.

What are some of the general trends in intolerances that you have seen?

We have found that eggs, dairy and wheat, as well as gluten, are the most common food allergens, no matter if it's in Hong Kong or other Western countries.

Are there any food intolerances that this kit does not cover?

NutriSMART tests 40 food items, which include most of the common foods that cause food reactions. But we have to admit that the test doesn't cover all foods that may trigger an intolerance – this is because theoretically all foods *could* cause intolerances.

Do you see very many people get a clean test with no intolerances?

Yes. There are people with clean results. Usually these people eat a balanced diet, do not overeat and do not eat the same foods too frequently. So far for the tests done by us, doctors with nutrition backgrounds come back with the cleanest results.

What should people do if they show a level 2 or 3 intolerance in the test?

Food elimination is always the best and easiest way to control a food intolerance. After a period of food avoidance (about 1–2 months), patients are suggested to reintroduce the foods into their diet – slowly and carefully. A rotational diet is preferred, as this eating pattern should reduce the gut burden to the minimum level.

What would you say to people sceptical of intolerances in general?

I understand why some people would think this way. In fact, at the very beginning, I personally did not believe food intolerances could relate to so many symptoms (from GI to your skin, from how you look to how you feel). From a medical point of view, food avoidance based on IgG4/IgG (the marker used in most intolerance testing) is found to be very helpful for some GI problems and migraines.

Another 'problem' is nowadays many people just follow the trend to go gluten or dairy free when their peers do. Some may think it is cool and trendy, as many celebrities are doing this; some may think this will help with losing weight. This is exactly the reason why profiling your diet (either by a food diary to cross-match symptoms with diet or by blood test) is important; the offending food varies from person to person.

If someone shows a gluten intolerance, how should they go about changing their diet?

Hidden gluten is commonly found in processed foods like processed meat, soy sauce, tinned foods and even soda powder. When someone is intolerant to gluten, the first step we always suggest is to find out all the hidden gluten sources by checking food labels. According to the law in Hong Kong, most packaged foods are required to come with a food label showing nutritional facts, ingredients and allergens. Gluten is one of these allergens.

Secondly, people with a gluten intolerance are advised to cook their own food and to try to stick to 'simple' foods at the very beginning like steak and potatoes, salad and fried rice. Many 'Oriental' foods also help: rice, rice vermicelli, rice pasta.

How do you think Hong Kongers in general will react to the idea of this testing kit for intolerances?

Compared with the traditional lab test, the food acceptance rapid test is more time and cost saving and more convenient for people to monitor their diets. Also, this would be a better option for healthcare practitioners keen to know the results in a short period of time in order to advise a 'new' diet to patients.

The concept of rapid testing is not new to people in HK (think pregnancy tests), but when it comes to taking blood on our own, people may hesitate. That's why we have set up an office in Central. People can come to buy the kit from us and our team will perform the test and go through the results with them. Greenamics have also uploaded a video on Vimeo to show customers how to perform the test on their own.

Why do you feel intolerances are currently so prolific in people?

Diet: many parts of the diet in urban life set the scene for food intolerances to strike. On the nutritional side, people who keep eating fast food and processed food have an increased burden on their guts; picky eaters also have a higher chance of developing food intolerances (i.e. consuming a specific type of food too frequently).

In addition to personal health conditions and food-intake frequency, food quality could be another factor. Heavy metals, plasticisers and pesticides are the common food contaminants that trigger various health issues and weaken our immunities. People with impaired gut health have a higher risk of getting chronic disorders of the GI tract, such as inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) and various food intolerances.

Lifestyle: in this modern society, people have to handle many kinds of stress. Stresses could come from work, from school or even from family. It has already been proven that stress may trigger food intolerances, and depression or anxiety may worsen symptoms in inflammatory disorders in the intestine. Also, people with

insufficient sleep are more likely to suffer from depression, diabetes and food intolerances, as well as reduced quality of life and productivity.

We always suggest that people prepare their own meals. The processing steps are bit time consuming, but homemade foods contain much less food additives and seasonings than restaurant dishes. From a 'body' point of view, all these unnecessary chemicals create stress on our internal systems. As we all know, too many food additives and seasonings are not good for us, and people don't have control over what is in a dish when they are dining out.

Awareness: in the past, when people talked about reactions brought on by food, they mainly focused on food allergies – very acute and dramatic symptoms. When it comes to symptoms that don't mirror a classic allergy, people have no idea how to classify these types of reactions. But now, more and more practitioners have begun attempting to see if food intolerances make people sick, and the impact is encouraging. That's why you will see food intolerances and low-allergen diets mentioned in many recent popular health and wellness books written by doctors and nutritionists.

Also, there are a lot of low-allergen packaged foods on the market. This partly reflects consumer demand and concern, but these products also make people more aware of food intolerances in general.

www.greenamics.com (http://www.greenamics.com)



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Your Guide to Good Taste

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