

Defining allergy fact from fiction

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From gluten allergy and hypoallergenic pets, to avoiding the flu shot because of an egg allergy, there are a lot of common myths and misconceptions about allergies. Many might be shocking due to a great deal of false information in the media and on the Internet. And some of the misconceptions can be damaging to your health if vaccinations are skipped and extreme dietary avoidances are taken.

But where did all of these misconceptions come from? According to a presentation being given at the Annual Scientific Meeting of the American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology (ACAAI), previously held beliefs from medical experts and public perception are partially to blame.

"Many early medical beliefs have been proven to be incorrect as research has advanced," said allergist David Stukus, MD, ACAAI member and presenter. "Unfortunately, some of these beliefs are still on the Internet, where an astonishing 72 percent of users turn to for health information."

In his presentation, Dr. Stukus outlined some of the greatest [allergy](#) myths, and explained why they are false.

1. I'm Allergic to Artificial Dyes – There is no scientific evidence to support a link between exposure to artificial coloring and allergies. Controversy exists regarding evidence for artificial coloring and behavioral changes in children, as well as dyes causing chronic urticaria and asthma.

2. I Cannot Have Vaccines Due to an Egg Allergy – Egg embryos are used to grow viruses for vaccines such as the flu, yellow fever and rabies shots. However, it's now safe to get the [flu shot](#), which can help prevent serious illness.

3. At-Home Blood Tests Reveal All You're Allergic To – These tests might be able to reveal sensitization, but being sensitized to a certain allergen, like milk, doesn't mean you're allergic. These sort of at-home screening tests are not reliable and can often lead to misinterpretation, diagnostic confusion and unnecessary dietary elimination.

4. Highly Allergenic Foods Shouldn't be Given to Children until 12 Months of Age – For most children, there is no evidence to support avoidance of highly allergenic foods past four to six months of age. New evidence emerging shows that early introduction of highly [allergenic foods](#) may promote tolerance.

5. I'm Allergic to Cats and Dogs, but Can Have a Hypoallergenic Breed – Unfortunately, there is no such thing as a truly hypoallergenic dog or cat. Allergens are released in saliva, sebaceous glands and perianal glands. It's not the fur people are allergic to. It is true that some breeds are more bothersome for allergy sufferers than others.

6. I'm Allergic to Shellfish and Cannot Have Iodine Imaging – Radiologists and cardiologists often use iodinated contrast during CT scans and other procedures for better imaging. Since shellfish contain iodine, many physicians have linked a contrast reaction to a shellfish allergy. However, this is false, and a shellfish allergy has nothing to do with the reaction. In fact, iodine is not and cannot be an allergen as it found in the human body.

7. I Can't have Bread, I'm Allergic to Gluten – You can have a gluten intolerance, but it's extremely rare to have a true allergy. Most allergic

reactions to these foods stem from wheat. Many people self-label as having gluten allergy and avoid gluten without any medical indication.

With information being widespread online via social media portals, how do you know what to believe and what not to believe?

"If you think you may have an allergy, you should see a board-certified allergist for proper evaluation, testing, diagnosis and treatment," said Dr. Stukus. "Misdiagnosis and inappropriate treatment can be dangerous."

Provided by American College of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology

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