

Many school children avoid basic foods unnecessarily

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Anna Winberg, doctoral student at Umeå University. Credit: Lena Lee, Sandro Ateljé School lunch. Credit: Wikipedia

A study on hypersensitivity to the basic foods milk, egg, fish and wheat among young school children showed that reported food hypersensitivity

was eight times more common than allergies confirmed by allergy tests. This according to a new dissertation at Umeå University.

"Most children with allergies to basic foods will develop tolerance before school age. It is therefore important to recurrently evaluate if the child's suspected or proven [allergy](#) has disappeared," explains Anna Winberg, [doctoral student](#) at the Department of Clinical Sciences and author of the dissertation.

"Parents might have been advised to exclude certain foods from the child's diet due to suspected hypersensitivity in the child during its first year of life. However, this elimination diet often continues until the child reaches 11-12 years of age, without the 'food allergy' having been evaluated. Many school children, therefore, remain on an elimination diet although it is no longer necessary, which can lead to a lower intake of important nutrients."

The study covered all [school children](#) at the ages 7–8 years in the municipalities Luleå, Piteå and Kiruna. The results showed that ongoing food allergy actually was rare in children who avoided basic foods due to perceived hypersensitivity. The study showed:

- Reported food hypersensitivity at the age of 7–8 was common (21%) and in a follow-up study at the age of 11–12, the prevalence had increased to 26%.
- Reported allergy to basic foods was eight times higher (5%) than the prevalence of allergy confirmed by allergy tests (0.6%).
- Despite that 14.5% of children at the age of 11–12 years reported that they fully or partly avoided milk due to perceived hypersensitivity, only 3% of these children had an ongoing milk allergy.
- Children with ongoing or outgrown milk allergy had a lower body mass index (BMI) compared to children who did not avoid milk.

There is no exact data available on the prevalence of food allergies in Sweden but an estimated figure of around 5–8% of children and 3–5% of adults are affected. Younger children with food allergies are often allergic to basic foods, milk in particular. Older children and adults are more often allergic to nuts, fish and shellfish. It has been previously shown that the majority of children allergic to basic foods become tolerant, often before school age.

"The results of this study show how important it is with correct allergy diagnoses and to recurrently evaluate [children](#)'s food allergies to avoid unnecessary elimination of food," says Anna Winberg.

The study also examined biomarkers in blood and stool samples in relation to the outcome of the allergy tests, also called food challenges. Some of the analysed biomarkers showed promising results as potential, future prognostic markers of an ongoing [food allergy](#). These results, however, need further validation by future studies.

Provided by Umea University

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