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Discussion of Frequently Asked Questions with Serum Food Allergy Testing:

The US BioTek (www.usbiotek.com) test panels measure whether or not your blood serum forms immunoglobulins when in contact with certain foods, spices and other substances. The panel typically ordered here tests 96 different food items: the IgE (immediate response) and the IgG (delayed response). Also available upon request is the IgA test--a measure of your gut immunity and reaction to the specific substances tested.

IgE reactions cause **immediate inflammation**. An **IgG** food reaction is more subtle, moreover, it will stay with us 3-4 weeks, *even if we are not eating the food* during that time. Because this type of reaction can take years to become apparent, we used to call these "food sensitivities" or "food intolerances". We now know that they are true allergic reactions--your blood forms immune globulins with these foods, causing a body-wide reaction. To deal with the inflammation the food causes (allergy is simply an inflammatory reaction to a substance), our bodies will do everything to *desensitize* the reaction so that we can get on with life. Eventually, the reactions and inflammation catch up with us. Some people can say that they "used to be allergic to _____, but they outgrew it". We do not "outgrow" allergies, rather, our body gets really good at desensitizing us to the reaction. Eventually, the body can no longer do this effectively, especially if we are eating a lot of an allergenic food. We cross the 'threshold', reactions become apparent, we feel "unwell". Every time we eat food we react to, 80-90% of our resources go to dealing with the inflammatory response, further complicating issues of depletion or fatigue as well as a "foggy brain", digestive upset, headaches, pain, congestion, full blown environmental reactions and autoimmune disease issues, to name a few.

To discover which foods cause us inflammation, we could avoid everything and fast for 4 weeks, however, for most people, this is not realistic. The serum test eliminates *some* of the guesswork. While our technology has improved even in the past 5 years, it is still not perfect. Our bodies are perfect. Discrepancies can still exist, and because the value is in knowing *how* the food affects us, the best use of this test is to go through a strict avoidance period followed by a meticulous re-introduction of each food, in its purest form.

For 6 weeks, (4 weeks to clear any reactions, 2 additional weeks to allow healing) we give our body's a 'vacation' from having to deal with reactive foods and allow a period of the body's own self healing by strictly avoiding the positive foods and food families--including the equivocally reactive foods (i.e. items that don't register a strong reaction and are in the family of a food with a severe reaction). After 6 weeks, each food is reintroduced meticulously and systematically in order to determine the body's reaction to it. Why does this work so well? Because when we've been clear of reactions and then reintroduce (or introduce a food you haven't eaten regularly), the reaction will be amplified; you will know *exactly* what the food does to you. This gives you the ability to make informed decisions about what you want to eat for the rest of your life! It is an adventure, many people have had 'surprises'--when a symptom completely cleared and then returned in force with the reintroduction of a certain food they had been eating regularly for years, or with a so-called 'healthy' food causing major issues for them. You may also find that some reactions are not a big deal and you can take extra enzymes or probiotics to help counter when you decide to eat the food for the rest of your life. Other foods may cause reactions so severe that you will decide that it is "not worth it!" Ever. Or, as we weave in and out of old habits, trying a certain food again for the umpteenth time, we know exactly why we feel the way we do.

While many healthcare professionals promote rotation and moderation diets to keep reactions at a minimum it is important to remember that every time a positive IgG positive food is eaten, the reaction is triggered again and the body goes into desensitization mode. Moreover, you may still be unclear as to why you do not feel well. Unquestionably, the value of the test is the avoidance and re-introduction process--to know exactly how each food affects you; to have advanced information about your food choices for the rest of your life. This kind of self knowledge is priceless.

The first week can be difficult: reading all labels, getting used to different foods and preparation routines, dealing with cravings and 'slipping' inadvertently. Planning is powerful-- it is beneficial to be prepared so that you are not "caught hungry"--for example, carry snacks with you at all times. By the second week, you have it down, you know what you are going to eat, you are getting into the routine and it becomes boring at worst. By the third week, people begin to feel different, better. Some folks in spite of strict avoidance, do not notice a difference until the 5th or even the 6th week. For now, focus on the avoidance. Return after 6 weeks to go over how to reintroduce--this can be the most difficult part for some because they feel so much better and do not want to go back to feeling worse. However, it is vital to proceed through with this part of the process--this is where we get the information we need. It's not that we "cannot eat" these foods ever again, it means that we get to choose whether or not we *want* to eat the foods, based on knowing how we react, and that goes towards improving our conviction and ability to choose well-being. It's not always easy; it is completely worth it.