


what's making these women sick?

A new test helped writer **Fayne Ansley** pinpoint food intolerances that were causing lifelong ailments. Here, she recounts her story and guides four *figure* readers as they try out the test.





My mother has told me countless times that I was allergic to milk as a baby. After she stopped breastfeeding, she tried giving me formula after formula, but I couldn't digest any of them. Finally, she discovered that I could tolerate soy milk, which I drank for the first few years of my life. Through my school years, I wasn't a big milk-drinker and stopped giving much thought to my allergy (also called lactose intolerance). I ate liberal amounts of cheese, yogurt and ice cream, and though my stomach was often bloated, I never connected it to the milk allergy.

Through my school years, I craved carbohydrates—bread, sweets, pasta, rice, potatoes. My mother encouraged me to eat more fish and vegetables, but I didn't crave them as I did carbohydrates. I also loved fruit because of its sweetness.

I was always a stocky child. I also had headaches, fits of irritability and unexplained sadness. I was a poor sleeper and felt tired all the time. My mother took me to doctor after doctor, but no one could find anything "physically" wrong with me. Many suggested it might be depression, and perhaps it was.

Several years later, I discovered a blood test that reportedly could diagnose food intolerances. By cutting out the foods that made them sick, people felt suddenly better. I couldn't imagine that the answer could be that simple, but I was certainly willing to try the test.

My mother agreed to be tested with me since she, too, was chronically tired, achy and plagued by excess weight. We each gave one vial of blood, which was sent to a lab for analysis. Within a week, we received our results, which indicated that both of us had significant food intolerances. I had to avoid all milk products since they made me feel bloated, stuffed up and lethargic. Sugar was deadly for my moods and my sleep, as was caffeine. Yeast was another problem, contributing to fatigue and bloating, even undermining my

immune system. Watermelon, spinach and lobster also showed up on my list. Some of my mother's offending foods overlapped with mine; some were completely different.

My food intolerances didn't require a trip to the emergency room or put my life in danger. But eating these foods could compromise the quality of my life, and if staying away from them could give me a greater sense of well-being, I wanted to try.

It wasn't easy, and I had many slip-ups. I started over on more Monday mornings than I can count. But I felt better immediately. The headaches were the first to go: I hardly had them anymore. Then the bloating and mucus disappeared. I lost a stubborn 20 pounds that had plagued me since adolescence. My energy level increased. My sleep was the last to improve, which it has done steadily over the past few years. I'm still not perfect about the diet, but at least I know that when I eat an offending food, I'm going to pay for it in one way or another.

Food intolerances affect most of us at some point in our lives. In the past, diagnosis involved an elimination diet, where foods were cut out one by one. This rigorous process was time-consuming and not always completely accurate. A scratch test was another diagnostic tool, wherein a diluted extract of the suspected food was placed on a person's skin and then scratched with a needle. The doctor then observed the area for redness or swelling to indicate an allergic reaction. The test was often painful, and again, not always completely reliable.

Today, a simple blood test helps clear up the confusion. There are various types of procedures, but the most effective and economical I've found is called the ALCAT. By analyzing your blood, the ALCAT gauges your individual immune reaction to a wide array of foods, chemicals and environmental substances. Because my mother and I both had such good luck with the test, the *figure* staff decided to put four other women through it to see if the ALCAT would be as effective for them. >

Iris Weiner (*left*) and Tiffany Gonsalves experienced health problems that made them eager to try the ALCAT test.



Tiffany, Iris and their offending foods.

Tiffany Gonsalves, 23,

is a psychology student who works part-time at Lane Bryant. Like Iris, she suffered from extreme fatigue and headaches. Her ALCAT results came back showing a strong allergy to mustard, a food she adores and often uses on sandwiches. She also showed reactions to apples, pears and bananas, indicating that sugar—even the fructose found in fruit—could be a problem.

After one week off the problem foods, Tiffany said she was feeling much more energetic throughout her day. “I can’t believe this stuff is for real,” she said. The ALCAT had proven accurate yet again. Tiffany has done remarkably well following her new diet. She still automatically reaches for problem foods including apples and pears, but her will power has been incredible. Her headaches are gone, though she still feels sluggish during the day, which she attributes to caffeine (especially diet sodas) and sugar. “Those are my next challenges,” she said.

Iris Wiener, 24,

formerly an intern at *figure*, is now in graduate school and freelances as an entertainment writer. Her busy schedule often tires her out, but many mornings she feels as if she can hardly get out of bed, even after a decent night’s sleep.

Iris’s ALCAT test revealed that she had candida, an intolerance to yeast which causes severe fatigue. “The only things I like are carbs,” Iris confirmed. Oftentimes, we crave the kinds of foods which make us feel the worst, since they tend to taste best and be the most addictive. Iris also showed a strong intolerance to sugar and white potatoes, which she had to eliminate in an anti-candida diet, since they feed the offending yeast.

Iris’s new diet has been an adventure. She tried to go “cold turkey” off her offending foods, but found herself headachy. (When beginning an anti-candida regimen, it isn’t uncommon to have headaches for a few days.) Although Iris has occasionally slipped up, she’s been a model patient and reports that she now has more energy. She’s also happy that she is finally concentrating on what she puts into her body and says the experience has taught her a new way of eating.