Dietary Restrictions: the essentials

It’s important to understand the different allergies, intolerances, and dietary preferences people adhere to. People adhere to dietary restrictions for a variety of reasons, such as for medical reasons such as allergies, for religious reasons, for environmental, moral, and health reasons.

Common Dietary Restrictions:

1. Vegetarian- vegetarianism involves avoiding all meat, whilst including dairy products and eggs in their diets. Substitutes for good nutrition include plant-based proteins such as pulses, legumes, soy, and soy products.
2. Vegan- veganism involves avoiding all animal products and by-products, including dairy and eggs. Substitutes for food nutrition include whole grains, fruits, veg, and plant-based proteins.
3. Pescatarian- pescatarianism involves avoiding all meat, excluding fish products, dairy, and eggs.
4. Gluten intolerance- gluten intolerances are split into coeliac and non-coeliac gluten intolerance. It can cause gastrointestinal discomfort and inflammation. Gluten is generally completely avoided, substitutes for good nutrition include oats, rice, and quinoa.
5. Lactose intolerance- lactose cannot be digested by the individual, as they do not have the enzyme needed to break it down. Symptoms include diarrhoea, pain, and stomach rumbling. Substitutes for good nutrition include plant-based milks, hard-mature cheeses are often tolerated, as well as butter.
6. Religious food restrictions- two common restrictions are, kosher, which involves severally processes including not mixing meat and dairy, and halal, which involves specific guidelines that must be followed for animal raising and slaughtering, and certain foods are prohibited.

Allergies and Intolerances:

Food hypersensitivities can be immune mediated, which is allergies, or non-immune mediated, which is intolerances. Intolerances are generally less threatening and can mostly tolerate small amounts, whereas with allergies the foods often must be completely avoided. Symptoms include gastrointestinal, respiratory, and cutaneous.

Some of the most common allergies include milk, eggs, shellfish, tree nuts, peanuts, wheat, and soy. Cow’s milk is the most reported food allergy in children, accounting for 40-50% of allergies. 14 ingredients must be reported as allergies on food products, this includes gluten, peanuts, tree nuts, celery, mustard, eggs, milk, sesame, fish, crustaceans, molluscs, soya, sulphites, and lupin.

Whereas food allergies are caused by proteins interacting with the immune system, food intolerances are caused by non-proteins, with no immune system involvement. Some examples of intolerances include lactose, histamine, which is a reaction to certain naturally occurring substances in foods, such as tuna, red wine, and tomatoes, salicylate, which is a reaction to substances that are chemically similar to aspirin, such as some fruits, veg, nuts, herbs, and spices.

How to Manage Intolerances and Allergies:

Research suggests that early introduction of peanuts may decrease the development of peanut allergies, demonstrating the importance of not avoiding foods prior to assessment. Allergies are often heredity, and you can often assess any concerns you may have through food diaries. Food diaries involves logging what foods you eat, any symptoms you may have following eating, and when they occur. Generally, food intolerances lead to unpleasant physical reactions such as bloating, and stomach pain, which occur a few hours after eating. Many people assume they have food intolerances when the true cause may be something else, so it’s important to thoroughly assess the situation before cutting foods or food groups out of your diet.

Following food diaries, you can use elimination diets to confirm you are having a reaction to a food, this involves cutting the food out of your diet or foods, and then reintroducing it after a period to see if you have a reaction.

It’s important that if you have an allergy, you maintain an avoidance diet, involving cutting out the food entirely. It’s important in this case that children maintain nutrition for optimum development, researching the nutritional impacts of cutting that food out of your diet and what substitutions or supplements you may need is vital. You can measure your child’s nutritional status through their height and weight. Additionally, learning to read and interpret food labels is essential in compliance.