

Smells and fumes Food intolerances sometimes go hand-in-hand with intolerances to various smells and fumes including perfume, car exhaust, petrol fumes, fresh paint, cigarette smoke and other irritants, and can cause nausea, headache or respiratory symptoms. Reactions like this can be unpleasant, but they are not dangerous and usually resolve quickly after exposure ceases.

Predictable exposures such as the perfume section in department stores, supermarket aisles with cleaning products, petrol stations and underground car parks are easily avoided. If you're unexpectedly exposed, don't hang around—leave the area quickly and get some fresh air.

The outdoor environment can sometimes be a problem too, depending where you live. The air near main roads (with heavy traffic or lots of trucks and buses) can be quite polluted; and in country areas, bush smells and smoke from fires can trigger symptoms. Being near the ocean suits some people, but not others. If you're thinking of moving, try out a few different areas before deciding.

Home environment Make sure your home is well ventilated with fresh air. Indoor air can become quite polluted with volatile chemicals released from carpets and underlays, furnishing materials, gas stoves, cooking odours, unflued gas heaters and cigarette smoke. If you feel unwell in your home environment and you're not sure why, check for hidden damp or mould, gas leaks and other sources of irritant smells or fumes.

Avoid using products with a strong aroma, such as air fresheners, concentrated detergents, perfumed candles, incense, eucalyptus oil, and massage or aromatherapy oils. For smell-sensitive children, ask family members and visitors not to use perfumes and strong-smelling deodorants; school materials such as coloured markers, glues and paints may also be a problem.

If you're planning to paint or renovate your home, and you're smell-sensitive, choose your materials carefully. Watch out for oil-based paints, glues, floor varnishes, chipboard and treated timbers, all of which can emit volatile chemicals for quite some time when fresh or new. It's best not to handle these materials yourself; you may even consider staying somewhere else for a few days or weeks while the work is being done, and airing out your home before going back. If you're not sure about a particular material or product, ask for a sample, take it home and see what happens after you've had it in your bedroom or living room for a few days.



When packing or buying lunch, stick to fresh rolls, unpreserved bread or plain crackers. For fillings, choose foods you know are safe, such as chicken, roast beef or lamb, egg, iceberg lettuce, celery, chives, bean sprouts, pear jam and golden syrup. If you're not too sensitive, you may be able to tolerate a thin slice of fresh tomato, mild cheese, beetroot, grated carrot or asparagus.

Toiletries, cosmetics and cleaning agents Strong peppermint and menthol flavours and aromas are closely related to natural salicylates, so clean your teeth with unflavoured toothpaste, salt or bicarbonate of soda and avoid mouthwashes.

If you react to preservatives, read the labels of products carefully—most liquid cosmetics and sunscreens are preserved. If you're smell-sensitive, be careful with perfumes, deodorants, scented soaps, shampoos, conditioners, hair sprays, after-shave lotions and other toiletries. Vinegar and bicarbonate of soda are alternatives to strong-smelling detergents and cleaning agents.

Medications People with food intolerances will often react adversely to medicines. It's best only to take essential medications that have been prescribed by your doctor.

If you're salicylate-sensitive, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs such as ibuprofen and aspirin should be avoided. Paracetamol can be used for pain relief, with codeine if required. If you need to take blood-thinning medication, clopidogrel is a suitable substitute for aspirin.

For people who are sensitive to food colourings, the colouring agents used in tablets and capsules can be a problem. If there are no suitable white alternatives, surface colourings can be washed off tablets by rubbing them gently under running tap water; and capsules can be opened, emptied onto a spoon and taken with some pure maple syrup or golden syrup.

Children's syrups are flavoured, coloured and/or preserved, and most antacid liquids are flavoured. Discuss suitable alternatives with your doctor and consult a compounding pharmacist if necessary.

Over-the-counter cold and flu preparations (with paracetamol, antihistamine and decongestants), if needed, are usually well tolerated. If you've got a sore throat, you can gargle with lukewarm salt water, but avoid cough syrups, throat lozenges, menthol, oil of wintergreen, eucalyptus, essential oils, and herbal and other home remedies (for example honey; tea with lemon or ginger), most of which contain natural salicylates or related substances. Make sure you see your doctor if symptoms persist.

Dental anaesthetic injections usually contain preservatives and can sometimes cause unpleasant reactions. If this happens, ask your dentist to use plain lignocaine. For major surgical procedures, general anaesthetics are rarely a problem but the premedications and post-operative painkillers can cause distressing side-effects. Discuss the choice of medications with your anaesthetist beforehand.

