

Welcome

My life before I knew I was salicylate sensitive was confusing, frustrating, and painful. Even as a child, I never seemed to be well and the doctors could rarely find anything wrong with me. Diagnoses changed over the years from growing pains, rheumatic fever, “just accident prone”, to viral infection, post viral syndrome, stress, over work, over weight and so on. I am sure the underlying diagnosis was often “hypochondria” but nobody actually said that.

By the time, I was in my mid thirties I was a physical, mental and emotional wreck. Nothing I tried seemed to help. A healthy diet full of fruit and vegetables made me feel worse. Strict low calorie diets brought about some weight loss, usually not for long, but my other symptoms persisted. Counselling sorted out some of my inner confusion but changed nothing else. Homeopathy did help relieve some of my symptoms, especially the sinusitis, but the majority of the problems continued to recur.

My health deteriorated to such an extent that I was no longer able to go out to work. I had so little physical energy that even the simplest of tasks, such as feeding the cats, could reduce me to tears. My joints were stiff and inflexible making walking up stairs a nightmare. The additional muscle pain made lying down and sitting just as uncomfortable. I seemed to have a permanent headache, sometimes a migraine. My ears buzzed, my sinuses swam, my vision blurred, I put on weight and was bloated all the time.

Far worse than the physical symptoms was the loss of zest and interest in life. My memory was appalling and I felt

confused, irritable and very scared. At first I had no energy to resist being so ill and did little else than sleep and watch television. This “inert” time was not wholly without some positives. The one thing I could do was think— yes, it was often muddled but I could still do it.

I had tried everything—the doctors said nothing was wrong, alternative therapies and miracle cure diets (and, believe me, I had tried them all) had not worked. Instinctively, I felt that there was nothing seriously wrong with me, that the answer to my problems did exist and that it was simple. I was missing something and I had to find out what it was. I was not going to spend the rest of my life in this state.

A short while before becoming very ill I had helped Alex, my husband, identify the cause of his migraines, high blood pressure and depression. As I watched him get thinner, healthier, and migraine and depression free, I started to muse on food intolerance. The links between food and migraines are well known, and accepted, which is why I had been insistent that he try various diets until we unravelled his problems—a tyramine sensitivity and yeast intolerance.

At the time, it never occurred to me that my own problems might also be related to food intolerance. In all honesty, my symptoms seemed so diverse that it just seemed a ridiculous idea. However, I had tried everything else. To say I was sceptical is a gross understatement of how I felt. I was simply going to try this avenue because I had reached a dead end down all the others.

It was not a straightforward process but I eventually discovered that all my problems were being caused by a sensitivity to salicylates. Finding the information I needed was exceedingly difficult as there is very little information readily available on salicylates, and a salicylate sensitivity, except in respect of aspirin, is not accepted by many doctors. I

persevered and eventually was able to pull together enough information to begin my healing process.

I would be misleading you if I was to say everything changed overnight. Some things did. Suddenly I had more energy, my skin was clearer, my muscles and joints stopped hurting, I began to sleep better, felt calmer, stopped having mood swings, no longer experienced anxiety, lost weight, and so on. If only that could have been the end of the story but, sadly, it wasn't.

After a period of amazing good health, I began to experience the same problems when exposed to perfumes, air fresheners, detergents, scented candles, glues, paints and, so it seemed, virtually anything that had a smell and some things that didn't. I began to suspect that I had developed full-blown Multiple Chemical Sensitivity. Going anywhere outside of the house led to a reaction that left me ill for days. I seemed to get over one reaction and then another would arrive.

Bewildered, I delved back into more research and discovered that salicylate not only occurs naturally in food but also, in various other forms, is used in the manufacture of the products that we use every day in our homes, shops, and offices. I had already discovered that applying a product containing salicylate on my skin would lead to problems (chemical like burns on my face and scalp after using a highly coloured shampoo, a blotchy rash from a soap scented with oil of wintergreen and so on). Perhaps the same applied to inhaled salicylate. We cleared the house of as many scented products and chemicals as possible and tried to cut down on my exposure outside of the home. Almost imperceptibly, the changes began to take place. I began to have fewer reactions and the severity of the ones I had began to reduce.

I still experience reactions but, generally, only away from the home. My activities are restricted but less so than when I was ill—at least now I can walk pain free and think clearly!

The freedom and relief that I now have from simply being able to understand what was causing my problems is immense and extremely liberating. I no longer have to waste time worrying about what is wrong with me—I know and as long as I control my diet and limit my inhaled exposures, I am healthy.

Convinced that I was far from unique, I wanted to share my experiences and the information I had acquired and so the *Food Can Make You Ill* (www.foodcanmakeyouill.co.uk) web site was born. That and the success of my first book, *Change Your Diet and Change Your Life*, further fuelled my drive to get information on food intolerance out to people. If my life could be so impaired so could that of others. If I could experience such dramatic changes, physically, mentally and emotionally, then so could others.

I have resisted writing *The Salicylate Handbook* for some time because I still feel as if I am learning but as the number of queries I receive on salicylate continuously increases I felt that the time was right to pull together the knowledge that I had acquired and to share it with others.

You should be aware that the role of salicylate in illness is a controversial one and is not accepted by many in the medical profession. I hope that in time this will change and the hidden suffering that many undergo will stop but until that time we have to do the best we can with the information we have available. This handbook is designed to be used as a resource you can dip into whenever you need to check on the different ways in which salicylate sensitivity can affect your health. Before using it in this way, I suggest you familiarise yourself with the whole book.

Wherever possible, I have included references so that you can follow up specific papers of interest. I have endeavoured to keep the amount of scientific jargon to a bare minimum and have only used studies that I have been able to “translate”. My

own experience is interwoven throughout and I make no apology for the speculation that also appears.

The above is the original 2002 introduction. So, has anything changed in the last ten years?

There have been some new studies on salicylate levels in food but they have been limited in scope and added very little to what we already know. I have however gone through these in detail and incorporated the information as much as I can. Some sections of the handbook have been expanded and altered but, as there have been no major advances in understanding the causes of salicylate sensitivity or in its management and treatment, the core information remains the same.

Over the years, I have experimented with my diet a great deal and I have incorporated the useful aspects of those experiments in this new edition. I am still salicylate sensitive but things have become easier over the years.

I sincerely hope you find the information in this handbook useful and I wish you every success in finding a path to a truly wonderful state of health.

My very best wishes,
Sharla

Segment from The Salicylate Handbook by Sharla Race.
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Full details can be found on www.foodcanmakeyouill.co.uk