

# Is Junk Food Causing Food Allergies?

“Back in my day, no one had these so-called food allergies, and we ate whatever we wanted!”

Anyone with food allergies or diet restrictions has heard a statement like the one above, and it turns out eating whatever you want might be causing the food allergies in the first place. A small study based in Italy found that children with food allergies had higher levels of advanced glycation endproducts (AGE), substances found in highly processed foodstuffs.

## What They Found

This new study is by no means a definitive answer to the question of where food allergies come from. First off, it's a small study. Researchers examined 61 children from ages six to twelve in three groups – those with food allergies, those with respiratory allergies, and a control group. The study drew a link between high levels of AGES and junk food consumption. Children with food allergies registered higher levels of AGEs. The lead researcher for this study, Roberto Berni Canani, thinks that link needs to be examined more closely.

*As of yet, existing hypotheses and models of food allergy do not adequately explain the dramatic increase observed in the last years – so dietary AGEs may be the missing link. Our study certainly supports this hypothesis, we now need further research to confirm it. If this link is confirmed, it will strengthen the case for national governments to enhance public health interventions to restrict junk food consumption in children.”*

# Acquiring AGEs

So what are advanced glycation endproducts? Glycation is a process where a sugar molecule like glucose or fructose binds to a protein or lipid molecule without an enzyme to control the process. You're probably a big fan of glycation already – a prominent example of this chemical reaction is the Maillard reaction, also known as the browning of food. Glycation makes food delicious, and AGEs are the end result of that process. But that deliciousness comes at a price.

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The first issue is with the loss of enzyme activity. Applying heat to food is the easiest way to initiate glycation, but that also destroys enzymes. Glycation and AGEs have also been linked to oxidative stress and inflammation in the body and conditions like diabetes, atherosclerosis (where plaque builds up inside the arteries), and neurological disorders. Highly processed junk food is usually heat processed, and that can lead to high levels of potentially harmful AGEs.

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## What Goes In

The body is able to clear AGEs in low levels, but the amount of those endproducts found in the modern diets isn't at a low level. In addition to that, AGEs can impair the body's function, leading to issues like diabetes or potentially food allergies. What we eat makes a big difference in our health, sometimes in ways we don't even think about.

### Sources:

- *Researchers warn: junk food could be responsible for the food allergy epidemic – Eureka Alert*
- *Junk food may be fueling rise in food allergies, say*

*experts – Guardian*

- *What Are Advanced Glycation End Products (AGEs)? – Healthline*
- *Advanced Glycation End Products in Foods and a Practical Guide to Their Reduction in the Diet – NCBI*