

**A STUDY ON FOOD HYPERSENSITIVITY AND ITS PREVALENCE, KNOWLEDGE,
AND PRACTICES AMONG THE PATIENTS ATTENDING THE DERMATOLOGY
UNIT, TEACHING HOSPITAL, BATTICALOA, SRI LANKA**

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Food allergies are hypersensitivity reactions initiated by specific immunological mechanisms due to food allergens. They become a common and serious public health concern globally, with a rising prevalence. Clinically, various types of food allergens have identified around the world. However, the data on food allergies in Sri Lanka is limited. This study was carried out to study the prevalence, knowledge and practices regarding food hypersensitivity in the patients of the Dermatology unit of Teaching Hospital, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka. A cross-sectional descriptive study was employed by a random sampling technique among the patients. ERC approval was obtained from ERC-FIM (Reference: ERC UG 24/288). The study tool was a self-administered questionnaire and descriptive data analysis was used to report the results. Among the 245 patients, 40% self-declared food-specific hypersensitivity reactions. Allergic to fruits and vegetables was the commonest (72.4%), followed by fish (64.3%) and shellfish (31.6%). Wheat (2%) allergies were rare. In addition, soft drinks were hypersensitive for 2 patients under the 'Other food' category (2%). Fruits and vegetables were the major allergens, while wheat allergy was uncommon. Also, males showed a higher prevalence and it was more among the 31-60-year-olds and less among the above 60-year-olds. Most of the participants identify Food allergies correctly. However, a notable proportion (24.5%) failed to differentiate true Food allergies from food intolerance or contamination-related illnesses. And, 55.5% of the participants did not believe Food allergies could be life-threatening. Only 31.6% of respondents who self-declared hypersensitivity, consistently check food labels, either "always" or "often" while 65.3% reported "rarely" reading labels, and an additional 3.1% "never" checked labels. Likewise, 58.2% of them reported adhering to specific dietary restrictions, while 41.8% did not follow any restrictions despite having Food allergies. Varying levels of awareness, knowledge and practices were noticed. Though a high level of knowledge regarding general factors of food allergies noticed in the study, some misconceptions and risky medical management practices were also observed.

Keywords: Food, Allergy, Hypersensitivity, Temperament, Dermatology