

ELIMINATION DIET

Comprehensive Guide

Why the Elimination Diet?

Do you suffer from any of the following conditions: digestive problems, headaches, chronic sinus drainage, low energy, depression, mood swings, eczema, skin irritations, joint aches, asthma, and/or weight gain?

Health problems such as these may be related to a specific food or foods eaten frequently. Many people with food sensitivities don't even realize how awful they feel until the trigger foods are removed from the diet.

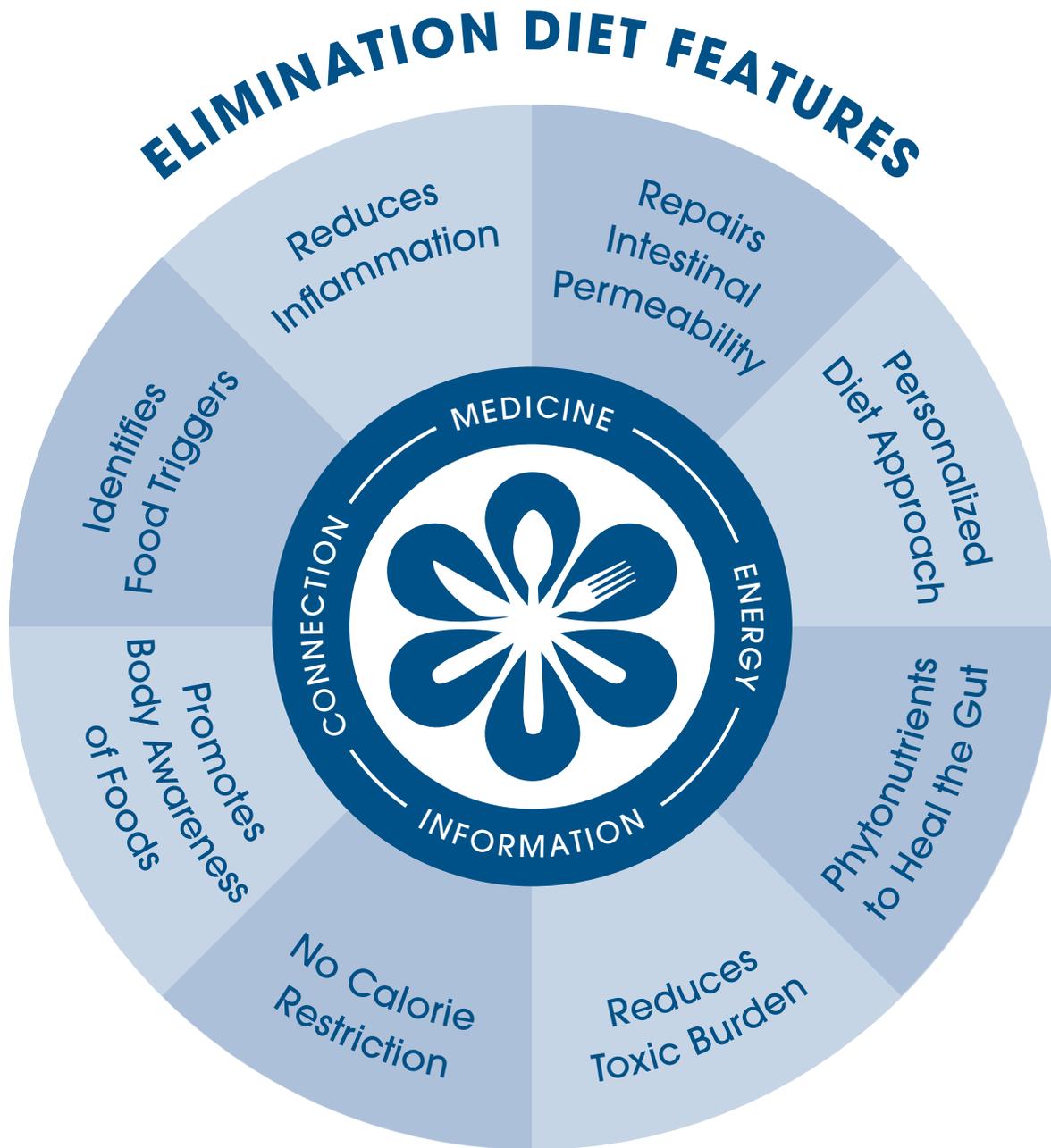
Food reactions are a frequently overlooked cause of chronic health issues. Some reactions occur immediately after eating the food (allergy), but in other cases, symptoms may be delayed by several hours or even days (referred to as food sensitivity or food intolerance). Removing specific foods from your diet will allow the body to recover and begin to function efficiently again.

These adverse food reactions are common because the same foods are eaten day after day, resulting in greater sensitization to these foods. If the right foods are not eaten, digestion and absorption may be impaired. Additionally, those with weakened immune systems may be more prone to food sensitivities.

The Elimination Diet helps to uncover food(s) that may be the culprits. It is a very useful tool for diagnosing adverse food reactions, whether true allergy, intolerance, or sensitivity.

Often, symptoms that have failed to respond to conventional medical therapy will resolve by following an Elimination Diet. After the initial period of eliminating foods, many chronic symptoms should improve or disappear. When the burden on the immune system is decreased, the body has an opportunity to heal. Along the way, it is important to learn how to eat an enjoyable and nutrient-dense diet while starting on the road to optimum health!





Fats & Oils

Choose minimally refined, cold-pressed, organic, non-GMO fats and liquid oils whenever possible, as these will be the best quality. Remember that fats and liquid oils break down in heat, light, and oxygen so keep them in dark glass containers and throw them out if they smell rancid. Note that canned coconut milk is included in this category because it is predominantly a fat (not a dairy alternative) when purchased in the can.

Nuts & Seeds

The nuts and seeds category gives a variety of options to choose from if a snack is needed throughout the day. They may be sprinkled on top of salads, cereals, or vegetables. One to two servings of nuts daily are recommended unless one is allergic.

Protein

Protein helps stabilize your blood sugar, which in turn keeps hunger at bay. When possible, include some protein in every meal. High-quality proteins of any kind are the best choice, including lean, grass-fed, organic, non-GMO sources.

Legumes

Legumes are a perfect source of quality protein and complex carbohydrate, which gives a sense of fullness and stabilizes blood sugar. At least one serving of legumes on a daily basis in the form of soup, cooked beans, dips, or hummus, is recommended.

Non-Starchy and Starchy Vegetables

Ideally, it would be best to get 10-12 servings of vegetables per day. A serving is $\frac{1}{2}$ cup cooked vegetable or 1 cup raw leafy greens. Green vegetables, especially members of the cabbage family, are particularly nutritious for those on the Elimination Diet. Eat a “rainbow of colors” in addition to greens: red beets, red peppers, radishes; orange carrots, orange pepper, yams, sweet potatoes, and winter squash; yellow summer squash, yellow peppers; white onions and garlic.



There are compounds in certain vegetables (and fruits) that may cause reactions in sensitive individuals. These compounds are called histamines, oxalates, and salicylates. Additionally, healthcare practitioners may choose to have their patients avoid a class of plant foods called nightshades if there is reason to think that these foods are causing symptoms.

Histamines

Histamine is a key mediator in inflammation. It occurs naturally in many foods and is also produced by the body during times of stress and allergy. Histamine is made and stored in mast cells and is released during allergen exposure, causing dilation of blood vessels, increased mucus production, and broncho-constriction. The release of histamine results in various symptoms such as itching, sneezing, asthma, headache, and rash. Additionally, certain foods and food additives prompt the release of histamine from mast cells.

- Foods to avoid on a low-histamine diet: bananas, chocolate, strawberries, tomatoes, egg whites, pork, sauerkraut, cheeses, fermented soy products, sausage, spinach, ketchup, eggplant, alcoholic beverages, smoked meats, vinegars, and canned fish, along with certain food additives and preservatives such as tartrazine and other food colors, benzoates, BHA, and BHT.
- The histamine content in foods varies markedly according to storage and maturation; protein foods that may normally be low in histamine will actually have increasing amounts of histamine as they age (e.g., leftover beef) or ripen (a green tomato vs. a ripe tomato). Leftover foods, especially those containing protein, should be frozen immediately. It is generally advisable to eat only food that has recently been prepared.

Oxalates

Oxalates are found throughout nature in plants, animals, and humans. Please note that the leaves of a plant typically contain higher oxalate levels than the roots, stems, and stalks.

High oxalate-containing foods: blackberries, blueberries, raspberries, strawberries, currants, kiwifruit, concord (purple) grapes, figs, tangerines, plums, spinach, Swiss chard, beet greens, collards, okra, parsley, leeks, quinoa, celery, green beans, rutabagas, summer squash, almonds, cashews, peanuts, soybeans, tofu, soy products, wheat bran, wheat germ, cocoa, chocolate, and black tea.

Salicylates

Salicylates are chemicals that occur naturally in many plants. The bark, leaves, roots, and seeds of certain plants store salicylates, preventing them from rotting and protecting them against harmful insects, bacteria, and fungi. Many common foods, such as citrus fruits, berries, certain vegetables, herbs, spices, tea, and flavor additives contain salicylates. Chemically related to aspirin, salicylates may also be created synthetically and can be found in many drugs other than aspirin: analgesics, muscle relaxants, cough mixtures, antacids, cold and flu medication, and acne lotions. Certain perfumes, pesticides, and preservatives also contain salicylates.

In addition to specific foods that contain large amounts of salicylates, there are additional issues to consider. The highest amounts of salicylates are found in unripened fruit (salicylate content decreases as fruit ripens); unpeeled fruits and vegetables (salicylates are concentrated just under the skin); raw foods, juices, and dried foods; products containing additives such as sweeteners, toothpaste, food colorings and flavorings, and chewing gum; outer leaves of leafy vegetables; common spices and herbs including cayenne, cinnamon, cumin, dill, curry powder, paprika, thyme, oregano, rosemary, and turmeric.

Dairy Alternatives

There are several dairy alternatives on this food plan, mostly in the form of nut milks. When buying dairy substitutes like coconut, or the boxed variety of almond, hemp, oat, or rice milk, read the label carefully to ensure there are no sweeteners added to the blend. Note that there may be sweeteners such as brown rice syrup and evaporated cane juice in these products.

Fruits

Fruits are helpful for when needing something sweet, especially when one is used to regular eating of desserts and other sweets. It's always better to couple fruit with a little bit of protein to offset any blood sugar spikes.

Gluten-free Grains

Gluten-free (GF) whole grains, or those with an intact bran outer coat, are essential for those on the Elimination Diet, as they provide an excellent source of fiber and other phytonutrients to assist with detoxification. The only gluten issue concerning oats, and perhaps even other non-gluten grains, is one of cross-contamination when wheat is growing nearby, or if wheat, rye, or barley is processed on the same machinery. When purchasing oats, look for “certified gluten-free” on the label. Patients with celiac disease will have to ensure that gluten has been entirely omitted from daily eating. Healthcare practitioners may advise certain patients to limit the amount of carbohydrate from this grain category.

Sweeteners

- **What to Use:** Certain sweeteners, in very small amounts, are acceptable: brown rice syrup, blackstrap molasses, pure maple syrup, raw honey, coconut sugar, agave nectar, lo han, erythritol, and stevia. Use no more than three teaspoons daily of all sweeteners combined. Note that stevia is a high-intensity sweetener that requires no more than a pinch for maximum sweetness.
- **What Not to Use:** Table sugar and other highly processed sweeteners such as brown sugar lead to inflammation because they cause a dramatic surge in blood sugar, so are not advised on this program. Artificial sweeteners are not acceptable under any circumstances. Many sweeteners like high fructose corn syrup (HFCS) and corn syrup are derived from corn, which is eliminated on this program. Overall, high intensity sweeteners perpetuate a need for sweet-tasting food and make it difficult to enjoy the natural sweetness in all fruits and certain vegetables.



A Note About Chocolate

While cocoa has redeeming qualities in an otherwise healthy diet, all cocoa-related products like hot cocoa and chocolate are typically not allowed on the Elimination Diet due to the caffeine content. The healthcare practitioner will determine whether cocoa is an appropriate food item for individual patients during the diet.

What to Drink on the Elimination Diet

- **Water:** It is important to drink an adequate amount of water every day; about six to eight 8 oz. glasses daily are suggested).
- **Tea:** Many flavors of herbal tea are acceptable. The healthcare practitioner can provide guidance to the patient about including decaffeinated green and/or black teas.
- **Coffee:** Regular and decaf coffee are not allowed on the elimination diet. Coffee, while not high on the list of potential allergic foods, can have a significant effect on blood sugar and stress hormones. Eliminating coffee might lead to having headaches for a few days. One strategy to try is to slowly lower caffeine intake over several days to minimize the headaches, fatigue, or unpleasant withdrawal symptoms that are often associated with caffeine withdrawal.
- **Alcohol:** All alcoholic beverages are omitted from the Elimination Diet.
- **Soft Drinks:** Both artificially sweetened and regular soft drinks should be eliminated for the duration of the Elimination Diet. Try substituting seltzer water mixed with some juice or a squeeze of lemon, lime, or coconut water.
- **Non-Dairy Beverages for Tea or Cereal:** It is important to avoid non-dairy creamer as it contains refined sugars, along with unhealthy hydrogenated fats. Instead, use one of the non-dairy milk substitutes such as almond or coconut milk to add to tea or use in gluten-free cereal. See the food list for other ideas.



Touring Through the Food Plan

Food Substitutions

When you want this...	...eat this
Milk (for cereal or shakes), yogurt, cheese	Milk substitutes: unsweetened rice, oat, hemp, almond, sunflower, hazelnut, and coconut milk; unsweetened coconut yogurt or kefir; read labels to ensure substitute is lactose/casein-free
Hot cereal, such as Wheatena or other hot cereal	Oatmeal or steel-cut oats, rice cereal, quinoa flakes, or Apple Cinnamon Amaranth Porridge*
Cold cereal	Puffed rice and millet, crispy brown rice, amaranth cereals; all labeled gluten-free (note that there tends to be corn in foods labeled gluten-free)
Bread, crackers, & pasta	Gluten-free breads, crackers, or pasta made with brown rice, oats, teff, millet, quinoa, amaranth, tapioca, buckwheat, sorghum, potato flour, and garbanzo bean flour; cellophane noodles from bean threads; check labels for gluten-free with acceptable sweeteners
Quick breads	Chia Seed Applesauce Bread*, Pumpkin Oatmeal Pancakes*
Breading	Grind any allowable rice crackers or bread, or use almond meal (any nut meal), ground chia seeds, coconut, or coconut flour
Eggs	Store-bought egg-replacer, or blend 1 Tbsp. flax meal or chia seeds in blender with ¼ cup water and allow to thicken for a few minutes
Peanut butter	Nut butters made from almonds, cashews, macadamias, walnuts, hazelnuts or pumpkin and sesame seeds (tahini)
Ice cream	Various brands of rice or coconut-based frozen desserts; read labels carefully for approved sweeteners
Soft drinks	Sparkling or mineral water, mixed with a squeeze of lemon or lime, or with a small amount of your favorite juice (¾ water, ¼ juice); filtered or purified water with slices of lemon or lime; unsweetened coconut water
Coffee/tea	Herbal teas
Butter or margarine	Coconut oil or ghee (clarified butter)
Sugar & sweeteners	Unsweetened apple butter, brown rice syrup, blackstrap molasses, pure maple syrup, raw honey, coconut sugar, agave nectar, lo han, erythritol, and stevia.
Condiments	All types of vinegar, all spices, including salt, pepper, basil, carob, cinnamon, cumin, dill, garlic, ginger, mustard, oregano, parsley, rosemary, tarragon, thyme, turmeric, etc. Read labels! Mustard, for example, sometimes contains wheat.

**Refers to a recipe to be provided in another handout*

It's worth the effort!

Some dietary changes present greater challenges than others and it is important to keep in mind that feeling healthy is worth the effort. Keep the end result in mind. The first few days are the hardest, particularly when having symptoms of withdrawal from the foods commonly eaten several times daily (breads, desserts, milk products, processed and sweetened fast foods, pasta, etc). Be sure to shop ahead (using the shopping guide included in the recipe handout), and be prepared for quick meals or snacks when necessary. This dietary program may initially require more time and energy than typically spent preparing foods for each meal. It is worth your time – and remember that it is temporary. Most people feel so good that they want to continue eating this way!

How long will it last?

The healthcare practitioner determines the duration of the Elimination Diet for every patient. But, typically, the Elimination Diet is followed for three weeks. Shorter time periods than three weeks may not yield the same results, as the body needs time to clear its reactivity to foods that are triggers of your symptoms. Initially, current symptoms may worsen for a short time, rarely more than a few days, due to withdrawal from the foods commonly eaten. Transient reactions may be experienced in the first four to seven days as the body adjusts to the intake of different foods. These reactions include changes in sleep patterns, fatigue, lightheadedness, headaches, joint or muscle stiffness, and gastrointestinal complaints. Such symptoms rarely last for more than a few days and will vary depending on the person's body and lifestyle factors.

What foods can be eaten?

It is necessary to eat **ONLY** the foods that are on the food list. If a food is not on the list, then do not eat it. By the end of the prescribed period of the Elimination Diet, it is common to note improvements in many symptoms. People report increased energy and mental alertness, decreased headaches, decreased muscle or joint pain, decreased GI symptoms, and a general sense of improved well-being.

What about snacking and eating out?

It is typical to snack on whatever is available at work or at home. When following the Elimination Diet, have only acceptable foods around in the event of hunger. Have snacks and salad dressings at work for a quick snack or lunch salad. Eating out is generally not recommended since you will not be aware of all that is in the food served. Traveling is also best avoided during this time for the same reasons. It can be quite challenging to eat while on the road or in an airport. In the case of travel or visit with friends and/or family, it would be helpful to have food available to eat. Bring along fruits and vegetables that will travel well.

Helpful Hints

- **Plan from the start:** Before starting the Elimination Diet, it is important to have everything required within reach as planning ahead and strategizing will greatly improve chances of successful results.
- **Don't go hungry!** Be sure to eat enough food to avoid hunger when there is no food available. If there is a question about a particular food, check to see if it is on the food list.
- **Read all ingredient labels.** Check the “Hidden Foods” list for various foods and ingredients to avoid.
- **Eat enough food:** Add extra vegetables and fruits as needed. The menu is a basic one and needs a personal touch. This is not a calorie-restricted plan. Be sure to eat adequate calories for adequate nutrient intake.
- **Eat regular meals:** Eating consistently throughout the day will help keep blood sugar stable. Use the suggested snacks as needed for hunger or cravings.
- **Choose organic:** Whenever possible, select fresh foods and organically-grown fruits and vegetables to reduce the intake of pesticides and chemical residues. Wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly.
- **Choose cold-pressed oils:** Cold-pressed oils are not heated in the processing and tend to be healthier than oils that have been heated, as heat breaks down the oil. Organic oils are always preferred when possible. Note that it is difficult to find organic canola oil.
- **Eliminate caffeine:** Caffeine-containing beverages are not on this diet. If consuming these drinks on a regular basis, reduce caffeine intake slowly prior to beginning the Elimination Diet to prevent or reduce withdrawal symptoms. Try drinking half decaf/half regular coffee for a few days, and then slowly reduce intake of all caffeine. It is a good idea to first transition to decaffeinated coffee in place of caffeinated coffee (the same with tea), before removing all coffee and/or tea.
- **Drink enough water:** Remember to drink adequate amounts of plain, filtered water each day: six to eight 8-oz. glasses daily should be your goal. Add freshly squeezed lemon or lime for extra flavor.
- **Get rest:** Strenuous or prolonged exercise may be reduced for part of this program or, in some cases, for the entire program, to allow the body to heal more effectively without the additional burden from exercise. Adequate rest and stress reduction is also important to the success of this program. A light, daily walk may be the perfect exercise during this time.



The Role of Anti-Inflammatory Foods in the Elimination Diet

Inflammation is present if there is pain, redness, and swelling in the body. With inflammation, we tax the immune system's response. It is best to reduce inflammation so it doesn't happen for long periods of time. Inflammation is associated with many chronic diseases. All adverse food reactions create inflammation in the body. It could happen in the gut, resulting in diarrhea and/or constipation. It could occur in the joints, leading to arthritis-type symptoms.

To ensure that anti-inflammatory foods are the focus, include and exclude the foods in the respective categories below.

Anti-inflammatory Foods to Include:

In general, fresh fruits and vegetables, and foods that provide omega-3 fats are the best way to provide anti-inflammatory support to your body. The typical American diet contains a higher percentage of omega-6 fats which can be pro-inflammatory when they are out of balance with omega-3 fats.

Consider these features:

- 1. Fatty fish**, such as wild-caught salmon, mackerel, cod, tuna, and sardines, will provide a balance of essential fatty acids high in anti-inflammatory omega-3 fats.
- 2. Grass-fed lamb or buffalo** contain significant amounts of omega-3 fats that grain-fed animals are lacking.
- 3. Nuts and seeds**, especially almonds, walnuts, and flax seeds contain omega-3 fats and healthy fiber.
- 4. Dark leafy greens**, such as kale, broccoli, collards, cabbage, and other cruciferous vegetables high in fiber, may protect the body from pro-inflammatory molecules called cytokines. They are also high in the phytonutrients called glucosinolates that assist detoxification.
- 5. Red and blue colored fruits and vegetables** such as red cabbage and onion, red bell pepper, all berries, red grapes, cherries, and plums contain anti-inflammatory phytonutrients.
- 6. Extra-virgin olive oil (EVOO) and olives** contain anti-inflammatory phytonutrients called polyphenols.
- 7. Moist heat cooking under low temperatures**, such as crock-pot cooking, creates fewer inflammatory by-products such as AGEs (advanced glycation end factors), acrylamides, and others.
- 8. Certain spices**, such as turmeric, ginger, oregano, garlic, rosemary, cayenne, cloves, and cinnamon have anti-inflammatory properties due to the inhibition of pro-inflammatory molecules in the body. Use them in combination with food, especially when using high-heat cooking methods.



Inflammatory Foods to Exclude Even After the Elimination Diet:

Focusing on anti-inflammatory foods in the diet is not the only aspect to consider. What is not eaten is as important as what is eaten.

During the Elimination Diet, and even afterwards, reduce or eliminate the following:

- 1. Trans-fats:** Found in processed foods like cakes, cookies, bagels, and crackers.
- 2. Refined sugars:** Added refined sugars are pervasive in processed foods. Read the labels very carefully for sugars such as HFCS, corn sugar, corn syrup, and sucrose.
- 3. Foods with a high glycemic response:** High glycemic index foods create blood sugar spikes after eating; these can stress the body to overproduce insulin, which is not healthy. Over time, the body becomes less equipped to handle high-sugar foods, and inflammation increases from the excess sugar and insulin produced. Examples of foods with a high glycemic response are refined grains and breads, desserts, sweetened beverages, and highly processed prepared foods. Rice and bananas, both of which are on the Elimination Diet, are moderately high in glycemic impact so eat them together with protein to offset any blood sugar spikes.
- 4. High omega-6 oils such as corn or soy:** Most people eat high amounts of refined vegetable oils in their diet through the consumption of processed foods. These oils have high amounts of omega-6 fats and too little omega-3 fats. When the omega-6 fat level in the diet is too high compared with the omega-3 level, enzymes involved in inflammation can be activated. The goal is to balance those two types of fats.
- 5. Gluten-containing foods (wheat, rye, barley, spelt, kamut):** More people are learning that they have a gluten intolerance. While it is unknown why there is such an increase, it has been thought that the genetic modification of these grains in the modern era of agriculture has led to changes in how most people digest them in the gut. For some people, wheat may be more of an issue; for others, all of these grains could provoke inflammatory-related symptoms.
- 6. Saturated animal fats from grain-fed red meats:** Dietary fat has had a bad reputation for a long time. However, there are many types of fats and they are not all inflammatory – too much poor quality fat is the real problem. New research suggests that a high-fat meal, especially from animal foods, could lead to inflammation in the body. Adding vegetables to the meal can help to offset the inflammation. This finding does not mean that one should not eat animal foods, but that if they are eaten, vegetables should be included with the meal.



7. Dairy-containing foods: Foods that contain dairy products such as milk, yogurt, cheeses, and butter, in large amounts, may be inflammatory in certain individuals. This effect may be due to the milk itself or to the contaminants in the milk, such as growth hormone and antibiotics that were given to the cow.

8. High-temperature cooking with fats: The process of cooking can lead to the formation of inflammatory compounds in foods. Foods that take on a brown color with cooking are most notable for high levels of these compounds (e.g., fried potatoes, fried, broiled, grilled, and roasted meats and fish, pastries, pizza crust, bacon, etc.). Keep this information in mind both during and after the Elimination Diet, using slow-cook methods, as well as poaching and steaming methods instead of grilling, broiling, and frying.



Guidelines for Reintroducing Foods

How to Get Started

To help identify potential problem foods once the Elimination Diet has been completed, the foods thought to be associated with symptoms (“challenge foods”) should be reintroduced into the diet at two-day intervals.

1. On the first day of the reintroduction phase, choose whatever food is missed the most or craved the most, or eaten most often. The order of reintroduction of foods is not critical.
2. Eat a generous amount of that food throughout Day 1 (2-3 average size portions), while continuing to eat the other foods from the Elimination Diet. During that day, and the next (Day 2), record any symptoms on the Food Reintroduction – Symptoms Tracker chart (available from your healthcare practitioner).
3. If there is no reaction to the food during this two-day period, keep that food in the food plan and reintroduce a second food in the same manner (introduce the food on Day 3 and watch for any symptoms on Day 3 and Day 4). If no reaction, keep that food in the diet and add the third challenge food and so on.

If any food is associated with symptoms, stop eating that food immediately, wait till the symptoms clear, and reintroduce the next food. Retest any foods that give symptoms after testing all of the challenge foods using the same procedure of one day of eating the food followed by a 24-hour waiting period and noting symptoms during this two-day period.

The Order of Testing Your Challenge Foods

Below are the various types of foods that have been eliminated. Develop a priority order as to how they should be reintroduced:

Dairy, Soy, Corn, Peanuts, Eggs, Beef, Pork, Shellfish

Some people eliminate wheat throughout the entire time of food challenge, adding it back last. After the above foods, begin to challenge the remaining foods that were avoided during the Elimination Diet such as barley, rye, coffee/tea (regular or decaf), chocolate, alcohol, sweeteners, food additives, etc.

For each of these categories of food, identify pure forms of a sample food to eat (no additives or ingredients that have been eliminated, such as sugar or preservatives, in these foods). The following are examples of pure foods from each of these food categories.

Guidelines for Reintroducing Foods

Types and Amounts of Foods to Re-Introduce

Food/Group	Challenge Food (Examples)	Average Portion Size
Wheat/gluten	100% whole wheat cereal (e.g., Wheatena) 100% whole wheat noodles	½ cup 1 cup
Dairy	Milk (skim, 1%, 2%, or whole milk) Cheese (any whole milk cheese, no additives)	1 cup 1 ounce
Corn	Fresh or frozen corn kernels	½ cup or 1 small cob
Pork	Cooked meat, not in a casserole	3-6 ounces
Egg	Hard or soft boiled or poached	2 eggs
Peanuts	Raw or dry roasted peanuts Peanut butter made of 100% peanuts only	¼ cup nuts 2 T peanut butter
Soy	Edamame Soy milk Tofu, tempeh	½ cup 1 cup ½ cup
Shellfish	Challenge individual shellfish each time*	3-6 ounces
Barley, rye	Cooked barley or rye cereal 100% rye crackers	½ cup 2-3 crackers

**It is not uncommon to react to only one type of shellfish, such as shrimp, but not others, so it is wise to challenge each separately.*

Pitfalls of Challenging Foods

When assessing the other foods eliminated from the diet, such as coffee or caffeinated beverages, chocolate, food additives, or alcohol, challenge just that food alone.

Examples:

1. Chocolate candy also contains sugars, so beware of any reaction to a candy bar, as it will not be clear if there is a reaction to the chocolate or the sugar, or even some of the other additives!
2. Do not challenge a mocha drink that contains coffee AND chocolate, or a coffee drink that contains some alcohol.

Other types of food used for challenging that may cause confusion include pizza or lasagna, which contain both dairy and wheat/gluten. It is also not unusual to react to wheat but not the other gluten grains, such as rye or barley.

The Takeaway: Reintroduce pure, uncomplicated foods rather than complex foods.

Guidelines for Reintroducing Foods

Reactions to Challenge Foods

Stop eating any foods that produce a clear negative reaction.

Potential reactions include diarrhea or constipation, fatigue, depression, anxiety, gas, bloating and/or abdominal pain, headache, muscle or joint pain, skin irritations or break outs, insomnia, sinus congestion or runny nose, itching or flushing.

Track symptoms on the Food Reintroduction – Symptoms Tracker chart that will be provided to you by the healthcare provider along with instructions on how to use the chart.

IMPORTANT: When there are symptoms after challenging a food, it is advisable to stop eating that food immediately to allow symptoms to completely clear before introducing the next food. The “problem” food can be tested again after testing each of the challenge foods.

Removing Foods Associated with Symptoms

Remove from the diet foods that provoke symptoms for three to six months. During this time, the healthcare practitioner may recommend medical foods or dietary supplements to help support the body in healing.

After completing the initial testing of all the foods that have been removed during the Elimination Diet Food Plan, it may also be useful to test individual foods within a single food grouping to see if there exists sensitivity to certain forms of the food.

When going further with testing, it will be worthwhile to include a variety of foods within the same food group.

For example, within the dairy grouping, test cow’s milk cheese, sheep cheese, and goat cheese. Yogurt and butter may often be tolerated, when milk is not.

In the wheat grouping, test sprouted wheat products, spelt, emmer (farro), einkorn and any other ancient forms of wheat or sourdough wheat.

Use the same process in the original challenge testing of introducing only one food at a time for one day, with a 24-hour observation period. If no reactions, proceed to the next food in that group. If there are symptoms, wait until all symptoms clear, then test the next food in that group.

Consult with a healthcare practitioner if there are questions when reintroducing foods.

What is the difference between a food allergy, food intolerance, and food sensitivity?

A food allergy is an immediate, pronounced immune reaction to a specific food that occurs every time one eats that food in small amounts. A food that produces an allergic response will result in the immune system identifying it as foreign. It will attack its proteins, causing allergic symptoms (swelling, itching, breathing difficulties, etc). While the allergic reaction is mediated by the immune system (IgE), reactions that can be due to sensitivity or intolerance are associated with delayed (by several hours or days) or hidden symptoms that are difficult to interpret. They, too, could involve the immune system (IgG), as often occurs with sensitivities, or may be due to the way the body processes a food because it lacks an enzyme, as in lactose intolerance.

While it is common to call an adverse food reaction a “hidden food allergy,” a large portion of these reactions are actually considered to be an intolerance or sensitivity. Other than lactose intolerance, there are other important intolerances to consider when looking at chronic symptoms; histamine, salicylate, fructose, and gluten intolerance to name a few. In general, food intolerance refers to responses to food or naturally-occurring compounds in foods that are not allergy-induced; they may stem from a variety of causes, including an inability to digest and assimilate nutrients.

A qualified healthcare practitioner will assist the patient in determining whether a food allergy and/or food intolerance is present.

Isn't a blood test to determine food allergies, intolerances, and/or sensitivities more accurate than following the Elimination Diet?

Blood tests that claim to identify food reactions have not proved as dependable and accurate in identifying problem foods as the Elimination Diet with subsequent challenging foods. Patients may want to see “proof” by doing a blood test, but the results of blood testing may not tell the full story. Food intolerances may not show up on these blood tests since there may be no actual immune response.

What if the Elimination Diet doesn't resolve symptoms?

When the Elimination Diet does not bring resolution to symptoms, it may be necessary to investigate further with your healthcare provider. It is essential to assess whether one was consistently compliant with the Elimination Diet and whether the food challenges were carried out correctly. To achieve good results, it is necessary to follow the diet 100%. It's better to spend the time to do it right the first time rather than have to do the program another time, which will be an inconvenience.

If the diet was properly followed, the healthcare practitioner may decide to put the patient on another protocol to address other issues, perhaps a food plan geared specifically to eliminate certain sugars, or maybe a plan to remove foods that contain one or more of the following: histamines, nightshades, salicylates, and/or oxalates.

What do I eat in place of bread?

Rice cakes and tortillas made from rice or hemp can be an acceptable substitute for a sandwich. It might also be a good idea to eat less grain carbohydrates during this three-week period. Use a large lettuce leaf as a substitute “wrap” for vegetables and/or meats.

Frequently Asked Questions

Can salt be used on this diet?

Taste food before sprinkling on salt and use it sparingly. Look for salt-free seasonings if salt restriction is the goal, and choose sea salt over refined, iodized salt. Local health food stores offer a variety of these products.

What additional spices or flavorings can be used?

All spices and herbs are encouraged as they will enhance the natural flavors of food and contain powerful phytonutrients with antioxidant and anticancer properties. Experiment with herbs and spices – try some new ones. Fresh herbs should be added near the end of cooking, while dried herbs should be added near the start of cooking.

Which condiments should be used?

All types of vinegar are allowed (balsamic, ume plum, unflavored rice, apple cider, tarragon) and will help enhance the flavor of vegetables. The following condiments all contain added sugars or other ingredients that are not used on this program, so must be avoided; chocolate, ketchup, relish, chutney, soy sauce, tamari, barbecue sauce, teriyaki, sweet and sour pickles. Please check all labels on any prepared food if there is uncertainty about acceptability.

Legumes usually cause gas and bloating. What can be done?

Legumes are desirable because they are high in protein, fiber, vitamins, and minerals. Try to increase intake slowly over the course of one to three weeks. Soaking beans for one half-hour up to six hours (overnight) before cooking and then discarding the water may also cut down on some of the gas that many people experience. Rinsing canned legumes is helpful for removing carbohydrates that cause gas. Certain legumes may produce more of a response than others. Lentils and green peas, for instance, are often easier for some people to tolerate. If there is difficulty in digesting these foods, there is the possibility of being sensitive to them. A healthcare provider can assist in helping to determine whether there is a food sensitivity.

Can canned vegetables be used instead of fresh vegetables with this diet?

Fresh and frozen vegetables are preferable because they retain more of their vitamins and generally have less added salt. Canned legumes (chick peas, black beans, kidney beans, etc.) and tomatoes are generally acceptable, but rinse the legumes well before using.

What can be used in place of butter on vegetables and potatoes?

Extra-virgin, cold pressed olive oil and organic, virgin coconut oil have a distinctive flavor that works well with vegetables.

What needs to be done if it is uncertain whether a food reaction has occurred?

If there is uncertainty as to whether a food reaction was experienced, it is best to challenge that food again. Be sure that there are no unusual circumstances on a challenge day. For example, if having any symptoms, such as a headache, on a challenge day, it is best to delay the reintroduction of the food. Be sure that enough of the food is eaten to get a good challenge. If no reaction happens the second time, then that food is more than likely not a trigger food.

If all trigger foods are avoided for 3 months, how does one know when it is fine to eat them again?

After three months, try to challenge the foods again. If there is a reaction, try again after another three to six months. Other reactions may be “fixed” – no matter how long one avoids that food, the reactions will still occur. These are most likely to be the true food allergies.

If a food is rechallenged and found to be acceptable, how often may it be eaten?

The answer is different for everyone. With no reaction on re-challenging, it may be worthwhile to wait at least four days before trying it again. It is probably best to have a typical portion a couple of times a week. If a minor reaction is experienced, note this, and then wait a week between each time. This is not an exact science, so judgment and body awareness must be utilized.

There are many different types of elimination diets. How is this one from IFM different?

There are many types of elimination diets, ranging from very restrictive (eating only one food a day or just a few foods each day), to less restrictive (eliminating only one food or food group for a period of time). This Elimination Diet, developed by IFM, can be a very useful way to begin to identify problem foods, particularly when there is no suggestion of which foods may be connected to chronic complaints. This dietary approach includes elimination of gluten and dairy foods, along with pork, beef, corn, eggs, soy, peanuts, shellfish, caffeine, alcohol, and refined sugars. Some practitioners may prefer the simpler elimination of only gluten or dairy foods if those particular foods are strongly suspected

Examples of Typical Elimination Diets

- Traditional Elimination Diet (as described above)
- Oligo-antigenic diet, a very limited diet that eliminates many more foods while eating a very small number of foods that generally cause no or few reactions
- Gluten-free diet eliminates only gluten-containing grains
- Casein-free diet eliminates only dairy products that contain casein