

Why and How to Do an Elimination Diet

Allergists and dietitians have known for decades that between 2–20% of people worldwide may suffer from food intolerances. These practitioners use elimination diets to identify food intolerances, sensitivities and allergies. Learning these food triggers and avoiding them can reduce:

1. Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) symptoms like bloating, gas and cramps
2. Esophagus inflammation
3. Eczema and other inflammatory skin conditions
4. Chronic migraines
5. ADHD symptoms

What Is an Elimination Diet?

The best elimination diets are the most restricting. The more foods you remove during the elimination phase, the more likely it is that you will discover which foods trigger uncomfortable symptoms. Foods that are commonly removed during the elimination phase include:

- **Dairy products:** Eliminate all dairy, including milk, cheese, yogurt and ice cream.
- **Eggs**
- **Alcohol.** Alcohol avoidance is partly to help you detoxify, but alcohol also has a lot of sugar that helps things like yeast and harmful bacteria in your gut thrive. So when you eliminate alcohol, you may feel better in a few weeks, not just because of the absence of a sleep disruptor and a depressant in your life, but because you've actually changed the flora in your gut that are critical to keeping you healthy!
- **Starchy foods/grains:** Avoid wheat, barley, corn, spelt, rye, oats and bread. Also avoid any other gluten-containing foods.
- **Nuts and seeds:** Eliminate all nuts and seeds.
- **Legumes:** Eliminate all legumes, such as beans, lentils, peas and **soy**-based products.
- **Beverages:** Avoid alcohol, coffee, black tea, soda and other sources of caffeine.
- **Sugar and sweets:** Avoid sugar (white and brown), honey, maple syrup, corn syrup and high-fructose corn syrup, agave nectar, desserts and chocolate.
- **Nightshade vegetables:** Avoid nightshades: tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, white potatoes, cayenne pepper and paprika.
- **Meat and fish:** Avoid processed meats, cold cuts, beef, chicken, pork, eggs and shellfish.
- **Spices and condiments:** Avoid sauces, relish and mustard.
- **Fast foods**
- **Citrus fruits:** Avoid citrus fruits, such as oranges and grapefruits.

If you suspect that other foods not on this list make you feel uncomfortable, it is highly recommended to remove them as well.

No gluten, dairy, eggs, soy, fast food, or alcohol for 23 days.

Why Booze?

Eliminating [alcohol](#)

30% “clean” protein, i.e. organic, hormone-free, grass-fed, happy, lean beef, chicken, and wild fish and shellfish

70% vegetables, legumes (think [beans](#) and lentils), nuts, seeds, seaweeds, and gluten-free grains like [quinoa](#)

DO eat fish. (But watch out for [fish on the NRDC's high mercury list](#) like tuna and swordfish.)

DO eat lots of fiber, fresh whole foods, and unprocessed meals you make yourself.

DO eat lots of healthy fats found in olive oil, ghee, coconut oil, sunflower oil, flax oil, walnut oil, and avocados.

Do NOT eat processed health bars if possible. They often have 15 grams (or more) of sugar. If you need them for an emergency snack, the kinds I like are Go Raw pumpkin bars and Kind's "Nuts and Spices" variety, because they are very low in sugar.

Do NOT carbo load on gluten-free breads, cereals and crackers. Totally cool to eat some of these, but in an ideal world, you're not just replacing a lot of refined carbs with a lot of gluten free refined carbs.

Watch out for oats, they almost always have gluten!

How do I reintroduce foods the right way?

This is also much simpler than people make it out to be.

On day 24, pick one thing you eliminated—like gluten, OR dairy, OR eggs—but not more than one, and eat it.

See how you feel over the next 48 hours. If you have no reaction after two days, eat that same food again, and for a second time, notice how you feel. From there, it's up to you whether or not to re-incorporate that food into your diet on a regular basis.

Once you've made a call on the first food you reintroduce, pick another one and follow the same steps.

An elimination diet involves removing foods from your diet that you suspect your body can't tolerate well. The foods are later reintroduced, one at a time, while you look for symptoms that show a reaction.

It only lasts 5–6 weeks and is used to help those with a sensitive gut, food intolerance food allergy identify which foods contribute to their symptoms.

In that way, an elimination diet may alleviate symptoms like bloating, gas, diarrhea, constipation and nausea.

Once you have successfully identified a food your body can't tolerate well, you can remove it from your diet to prevent any uncomfortable symptoms in the future.

There are many types of elimination diets, which all involve eating or removing certain types of foods.

However, if you have a known or suspected food allergy, then you should only try an elimination diet under the supervision of a medical professional. Reintroducing a food allergen may trigger a dangerous condition called anaphylaxis ([4](#), [5](#)).

If you suspect you have a food allergy, check with your doctor before starting an elimination diet. Symptoms of an allergy include rashes, hives, swelling and difficulty breathing ([6](#)).

SUMMARY: An elimination diet is a short-term diet that helps identify foods your body can't tolerate well and removes them from your diet.

How Does It Work?

An elimination diet is divided into two phases: elimination and reintroduction.

The Elimination Phase

The elimination phase involves removing foods you suspect trigger your symptoms for a short period of time, typically 2–3 weeks.

Eliminate foods that you think your body can't tolerate, as well as foods that are notorious for causing uncomfortable symptoms.

Some of these foods include nuts, corn, soy, dairy, citrus fruits, nightshade vegetables, wheat, foods containing gluten, pork, eggs and seafood ([7](#)).

During this phase, you can determine if your symptoms are due to foods or something else. If your symptoms still remain after removing the foods for 2–3 weeks, it is best to notify your doctor.

The Reintroduction Phase

The next phase is the reintroduction phase, in which you slowly bring eliminated foods back into your diet.

Each food group should be introduced individually, over 2–3 days, while looking for symptoms.

Some symptoms to watch for include:

Rashes and skin changes

Joint pain

Headaches or migraines

Fatigue

Difficulty sleeping

Changes in breathing

Bloating

Stomach pain or cramps

Changes in bowel habits

If you experience no symptoms during the period where you reintroduce a food group, you can assume that it is fine to eat and move on to the next food group.

However, if you experience negative symptoms like those mentioned above, then you have successfully identified a trigger food and should remove it from your diet.

The entire process, including elimination, takes roughly 5–6 weeks.

If you plan to eliminate many food groups, seek advice from your doctor or a dietitian.

Eliminating too many food groups may cause a nutritional deficiency.

SUMMARY: An elimination diet works by removing foods you think cause discomfort. It then reintroduces them individually to check for symptoms.

What Can't You Eat on an Elimination Diet?

SUMMARY: A good elimination diet is very restricting, which helps you identify as many trigger foods as possible.

Risks of an Elimination Diet

Elimination diets are a great way to discover which foods cause problems, but they also come with a few risks.

Keep in mind, you should only follow this diet for a short period of time, between four and eight weeks to avoid nutrient deficiencies.

Children and people with known or suspected allergies should do this only under a doctor's supervision.

Children are more prone to severe reactions, like anaphylaxis (allergic reaction that can include an itchy rash, throat or tongue swelling, breathing difficulties, low blood pressure, vomiting, and lightheadedness. These symptoms typically come on over minutes to hours) when reintroducing a food group because their bodies can become extra sensitive to foods after avoiding them.

Nonetheless, it is worth trying an elimination diet regarding foods you suspect might cause you allergies or gut problems, especially those with the worst reputation for allergies like grains, dairy, or lectins. This means giving up *all* dairy products (milk, cheese, yogurt and butter) or whatever food you suspect for eight weeks. This is because your body makes antibodies to neutralize an allergen and it takes two months for your body to eliminate the antibody production caused by a food source.

After abstaining, eat a significant amount during the following day as well as other foods. The following two days, avoid the test group again, since it may take a couple of days for symptoms to appear. If you notice any of the following symptoms or other unusual changes, you'll know you should avoid that food group:

Bowel changes

Sleep changes

Mood changes

Memory impairment

A second test a month or so later should confirm it if you are uncertain (or unhappy with the results!)

The essential ingredients of a solid bone broth, according to bestselling author Sally Fallon, co-founder of the Weston A. Price Foundation, are bones, fat, meat, vegetables and water. If you're making beef broth or lamb broth, you should brown the meat before putting it into a stock pot. Fish and poultry, meanwhile, are fine to put in a pot without browning first. Then you simply add a bit of apple cider vinegar to your pot to help draw the minerals from the bones. For added nutrients and flavor, use sea salt, carrots, onions and celery along with parsley (or even better, Herbs de Provence). To receive additional multisystemic benefits, add ginger, turmeric and other tasty powerful herbs.

As you can see, the options abound for bone broth. Your Bone broth is one of the most beneficial foods to consume to restore gut health and therefore support immune system function and healthy inflammation response. Collagen/gelatin and the amino acids proline, glutamine and arginine help seal these openings in the gut lining and support gut integrity.