

How to Do an Elimination Diet: A Guide to Identifying Food Sensitivities



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Food is Medicine & Information

Food is information—each bite communicates with your cells, influencing digestion, inflammation, energy, and mood. Yet for many, certain foods quietly trigger symptoms that seem unrelated, such as fatigue, brain fog, joint pain, or skin issues.

An **Elimination Diet** is a structured, science-based approach to identify these hidden food triggers. By temporarily removing common culprits and systematically reintroducing them, you can uncover which foods nourish healing, and which hinder it.

This guide includes **two versions of the Elimination Diet**—a Basic Elimination Diet and a Full Elimination Diet.

If you're not sure where to begin, start with the **Basic version**. It's a gentle yet effective approach that removes the most common trigger foods and gives your body space to heal.

Once you've built confidence and begin noticing changes, you can move into the **Full Elimination Diet** for deeper healing and more complex symptoms.

Start simple, listen deeply, and build from there. Every step forward helps your body reset, restore, and rebalance.

Tip:

Over 70% of your immune system resides in your gut. Every meal influences inflammatory pathways, neurotransmitter balance, and immune regulation.



Stock Your Kitchen for Success

Preparation sets the foundation for success.

- Clean out your pantry and fridge of foods containing gluten, soy, corn, sugar, or dairy.
- Read labels carefully. Hidden gluten or soy can appear in sauces, seasonings, and dressings.
- Stock your kitchen with clean proteins, colorful vegetables, and healthy fats before you start.
- Batch cook soups, grains, and proteins for easy meals.
- Begin making fermented vegetables and freeze homemade chicken or vegetable broths.

Recommended Kitchen Staples:

- Quinoa, brown rice, and wild rice
- Pumpkin seeds, sunflower seeds, flax seeds, hemp seeds
- Coconut oil, avocado oil, and extra virgin olive oil
- Wild-caught salmon, chicken, turkey, and lamb
- Sweet potatoes, winter squash, dark leafy greens, cruciferous vegetables, avocados
- Frozen blueberries, raspberries, pineapple, and banana
- Fresh apples, pears, pomegranate, kiwi, and grapes
- Fresh and dried herbs (rosemary, thyme, parsley)
- Herbal teas and filtered water





Understanding Food Sensitivities

A **food sensitivity** occurs when your immune system misidentifies a harmless food as a threat, triggering inflammation. Unlike allergies (IgE-mediated), sensitivities are typically IgG-mediated and appear hours or days later. Immune “messengers” are released during a food sensitivity reaction.

Key Immune Messengers:

- **TNF- α** : Triggers systemic inflammation and increases gut permeability.
- **IL-6**: Sustains inflammation; linked to fatigue, as well as joint and muscle pain.
- **IL-1 β** : Drives fever, body aches, and gut inflammation.

Signs Your Immune System May Be Reacting to Food:

- Bloating or gas after eating
- Fatigue or brain fog
- Skin issues or eczema
- Muscle or joint pain
- Mood shifts or anxiety

Science Corner:

Chronic activation of these pathways increases intestinal permeability (“leaky gut”), allowing inflammatory molecules like LPS to enter circulation fueling more inflammation.



Why Follow an Elimination Diet?

Food sensitivities often create a “quiet storm” of inflammation, leading to fatigue, pain, and emotional dysregulation. When you remove the foods causing this reaction, your immune system can reset, your gut can heal, and your energy returns.

What You Might Notice Within Weeks:

- Improved digestion
- Brighter, clearer skin
- Better sleep and balanced mood
- Steady energy and sharper focus
- Reduced inflammation and pain
- Improved exercise performance

Mind-Body Tip:

Take five slow breaths before each meal to activate your parasympathetic nervous system and enhance digestion.

“Healing begins when you give your body the space to listen deeply.”





The Basic Elimination Diet

The Basic Elimination Diet is a gentle starting point for discovering hidden food triggers.

Removes: Gluten, dairy, eggs, soy, corn, and yeast.

Duration: 4 to 6 weeks (elimination phase)

Best For: Adults new to elimination diets, children, or those pregnant or breastfeeding.

Common Symptoms It Helps Address:

Eczema, fatigue, IBS, headaches, brain fog, joint pain, fibromyalgia, depression, anxiety, ADD/ADHD.



How It Works:

Elimination Phase (4–6 weeks):

Remove the six triggers completely and focus on whole, anti-inflammatory foods.

Reintroduction Phase:

Reintroduce one food at a time, eating it 2 to 3 times daily for 3 days, then pause for 3 more. Track symptoms carefully.

Functional Medicine Focus:

- Decreases antigenic load
- Lowers cytokine activity (TNF- α , IL-6)
- Enhances detoxification via cruciferous vegetables
- Improves microbiome diversity



Basic Elimination Diet

Foods to Avoid:

Remove:

- **Gluten:** Wheat, rye, barley, spelt
- **Dairy:** Milk, cheese, yogurt, butter
- **Eggs:** Chicken, turkey, and duck eggs
- **Soy:** Tofu, tempeh, soy milk, edamame, soy protein
- **Corn:** Cornmeal, corn syrup, popcorn, masa harina
- **Yeast:** Baker's yeast, brewer's yeast, nutritional yeast, beer, wine, vinegar (*except raw apple cider vinegar*)
- **Refined Sugar & Artificial Sweeteners:** High-fructose corn syrup, aspartame, sucralose
- **Industrial Seed Oils:** Canola, soybean, cottonseed, safflower, refined sunflower
- **Alcohol:** All types
- **Processed Foods:** Even gluten-free snacks with additives
- **Fried Foods:** Fast food, chips, battered or fried meals
- **Artificial Additives:** Dyes, preservatives, MSG, flavor enhancers
- **Trans Fats & Hydrogenated Oils:** Common in packaged snacks
- **Rancid Oils:** From old nuts, seeds, or fried foods
- **Caffeine (optional):** May be helpful to remove to reduce adrenal stress



Basic Elimination Diet

Foods to Include:

Include:

- **Vegetables:** Leafy greens, carrots, beets, squashes, cucumbers, sweet potatoes, broccoli, cabbage, tomatoes, avocados and more (aim for plenty of color and variety)
- **Fruits:** Berries, apples, pears, kiwi, bananas, mango, pineapple, pomegranate
- **Proteins:** Chicken, turkey, beef, lamb, bison, wild-caught fish, marine collagen, pure amino acid blends
- **Legumes:** Black beans, chickpeas, white beans, lentils
- **Healthy Oils & Vinegar:** Extra virgin olive oil, avocado oil, coconut oil, raw apple cider vinegar
- **Nuts & Seeds:** Almonds, cashews, walnuts, pecans, pumpkin seeds, sunflower seeds, chia & hemp
- **Gluten-Free Grains:** Brown rice, quinoa, millet, teff, certified gluten-free oats
- **Dairy Alternatives:** Coconut, almond, or hazelnut milk (unsweetened)
- **Beverages:** Filtered water, herbal teas, homemade broths
- **Snacks & Treats:** Energy balls, kale chips, seed-based cookies, hummus with veggies, smoothies



The Basic Elimination Diet

Sample Timeline for the Basic Elimination Diet:

Week 1–2: Detox and gut reset begin—symptoms may fluctuate.

Week 3–4: Inflammation begins to calm; digestion improves.

Week 5–6: Reintroductions begin—watch for subtle patterns.

Week 7+: Transition to your personalized, long-term nourishment plan. Healing takes time. Track your progress weekly to celebrate small wins.

Reintroducing Foods: The Discovery Phase

After your symptoms calm, begin reintroducing one food group at a time. Eat it three times daily for three days, then rest for three before testing the next.

Recommended Reintroduction Order:

Yeast →

Corn →

Soy →

Dairy →

Eggs →

Gluten

Reflective Journal Prompts:

- How is my energy today?
- How is my digestion or skin?
- Did my sleep change?
- What foods help me feel most alive?

Gentle Reminder: Reactions can appear up to 72 hours later—patience and awareness are your best diagnostic tools.



The Basic Elimination Diet

Sample Day on the Basic Elimination Diet

Breakfast: Turkey carrot hash and a kale-avocado-pineapple smoothie

Lunch: Quinoa bowl with leftover roasted vegetables and tahini dressing

Dinner: Baked wild salmon with sweet potatoes and steamed greens

Snack: Chia pudding with blueberries

Common Mistakes to Avoid:

- Hidden gluten (soy sauce, condiments)
- Testing foods too soon
- Ignoring subtle signs (mood, sleep, skin)

Supportive Supplements:

- Digestive enzymes with meals
- Broad-spectrum probiotic
- Magnesium glycinate for relaxation

Tip:

Keep a food-symptom journal. Patterns reveal your body's truth. If symptoms persist, add digestive support and move to the [Full Elimination Diet](#).



The Full Elimination Diet

The Full Elimination Diet is a deeper reset for chronic inflammation and complex symptoms.

Removes additional reactive foods: nuts, nightshades, citrus, sesame, pork, beef, chocolate, caffeine, and refined sugars.

Duration: Plan for several months for both the elimination and reintroduction phases

Ideal For: Autoimmune diseases, chronic fatigue, migraines, IBS, eczema, fibromyalgia, anxiety, or persistent inflammation.

How It Works:

Phase 1 – Detox (2 days)

Broths, smoothies, fresh vegetable juice, steamed vegetables, and herbal teas.

Phase 2 – Elimination (2–6 weeks)

Eat only healing, anti-inflammatory whole foods from the approved food list.

Phase 3 – Reintroduction

Reintroduce foods one at a time, observing symptoms for 3 days between each. For 2 months, you will test different foods to see what works for you and what doesn't, resulting in a tailored diet to help you feel healthier, happier, and free of nagging symptoms.





Full Elimination Diet

Foods to Avoid:

Remove:

- **Gluten:** Wheat, rye, barley, spelt
- **Dairy:** Milk, cheese, yogurt, butter
- **Eggs:** Chicken, turkey, and duck eggs
- **Soy:** Tofu, tempeh, soy milk, edamame, soy protein
- **Corn:** Cornmeal, corn syrup, popcorn, masa harina
- **Yeast:** Baker's yeast, brewer's yeast, nutritional yeast, beer, wine, vinegar (*except raw apple cider vinegar*)
- **Refined Sugar & Artificial Sweeteners:** High-fructose corn syrup, aspartame, sucralose
- **Meats:** Pork and beef
- **Chocolate:** Cocoa powder, chocolate chips, chocolate bars
- **Cane Sugar:** Brown sugar, white sugar, sucanat
- **Citrus Fruits:** Lemons, limes, oranges, grapefruits, tangerines, mandarins
- **All Nuts:** Almonds, walnuts, cashews, pecans
- **Sesame:** Seeds, tahini, sesame oil
- **Nightshades:** Tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, potatoes, paprika
- **Alcohol:** All types
- **Processed Foods:** Even gluten-free snacks with additives, seeds oils, trans fats
- **Caffeine:** Coffee, black or green tea, energy drinks



Full Elimination Diet

Foods to Include:

Include:

- **Vegetables:** Leafy greens, carrots, beets, squashes, cucumbers, sweet potatoes, broccoli, cabbage, avocados, onions, leeks, garlic, fresh herbs, ginger, and more (aim for plenty of color and variety)
- **Fruits:** Berries, apples, pears, kiwi, bananas, mango, pineapple, pomegranate
- **Proteins:** Chicken, turkey, lamb, wild-caught fish, marine collagen, pure amino acid blends
- **Legumes:** Black beans, chickpeas, white beans
- **Healthy Oils & Vinegar:** Extra virgin olive oil, avocado oil, coconut oil, raw apple cider vinegar
- **Seeds:** Pumpkin seeds, sunflower seeds, chia, hemp,
- **Gluten-Free Grains:** Brown rice, quinoa, wild rice
- **Gluten-Free Flours:** Brown rice, quinoa, tigernut, cassava, arrowroot, tapioca
- **Natural Sweeteners (moderation):** Maple syrup, raw honey, coconut sugar, stevia
- **Dairy Alternatives:** Coconut, hemp, tigernut milk
- **Beverages:** Filtered water, herbal teas, homemade broths
- **Snacks & Treats:** Seed energy balls, kale chips, seed-based cookies, raw veggies, smoothies



The Full Elimination Diet

Many people experience profound improvements in their health and well-being, even within just a few weeks of starting the elimination diet. By reducing the immune system's burden and calming inflammation, you create space for your body to heal on a foundational level.

Potential benefits include:

- Reduced chronic pain and inflammation
- Improved digestion and elimination
- Clearer skin and fewer breakouts or rashes
- Increased mental clarity and focus
- More stable moods and reduced anxiety or depression
- Fewer headaches or migraines
- Reduced autoimmune flare-ups
- Balanced energy throughout the day
- Better sleep and recovery
- Decreased cravings for sugar, caffeine, and processed foods

Detox Tip:

Prioritize cruciferous vegetables—such as kale, arugula, broccoli, and brussels sprouts—during your elimination diet. Sulforaphane from raw cruciferous veggies activates Nrf2, your body's detoxification switch.



The Full Elimination Diet

Healing isn't linear. Some days will be smoother than others. Trust the process; your body is recalibrating toward health.

If You're Not Feeling Better:

- Double-check ingredient labels for hidden gluten, soy, yeast, or corn.
- Add digestive enzymes and probiotics.
- Try removing high-histamine foods (leftovers, fermented foods).
- Get nutrient testing done to uncover hidden nutrient deficiencies.
- Evaluate for possible gut dysbiosis, candida, or SIBO.
- Consider working with a functional medicine practitioner for testing and guidance.



Transitioning Beyond the Elimination Diet

After identifying your reactive foods, maintain their removal and transition to a nutrient-rich eating pattern—such as the [Anti-Inflammatory](#) or [Mediterranean Diet](#)—to support immune regulation, metabolic balance, and cellular repair. This is about **long-term nourishment**, not lifelong restriction. Continue emphasizing color, variety, and whole foods for resilience and vitality.



Ready to Start an Elimination Diet?

Healing is easier when you have the structure, recipes, and community.

Whether you're beginning a healing protocol, managing food sensitivities, or simply eating to feel better, [Nourishing Meals®](#) provides the recipes, structure, and tools to help you thrive.

“When you nourish your body with awareness, healing becomes inevitable.”

Join the Nourishing Meals® Membership for:

- Over 1,800 recipes for every diet phase
- Elimination Diet meal plans and shopping lists
- Diet filters and reintroduction tools
- Functional nutrition education and guidance



Ready To Begin?

Inside the Nourishing Meals® Membership, you'll discover over 1,800 healing recipes, customizable meal plans, and grocery lists for every version of the [Elimination Diet](#).

Visit NourishingMeals.com/Meal-Planner to **log in** or **join** and begin building your personalized healing plan.