

Eliminating intolerant foods – good idea or not?



Food elimination can sometimes change the quality of your life for the better, once you've worked out what food it is you need to avoid. But is this a good idea long term and is it necessary to avoid this food then for the rest of your life? The good news is no! Most people don't have to do this forever.

People eliminate certain foods for many reasons. There are of course particular cultural, ethical and personal beliefs behind many dietary eliminations. People also cut certain foods because they believe they have an intolerance. They may have experienced symptoms such as stomach upsets, rashes or insomnia. Sometimes people are truly allergic, in which case, consuming that food can be dangerous or even life threatening.

In actual fact, the only people who really need to completely avoid a particular food are those who do have a true anaphylactic allergy. However, only 2-5% of food reactivity is actually due to a true allergic reaction. The rest are generally intolerances that have developed over time



Digestive processes

Food intolerances can develop for a number of reasons. For example, a reduction in stomach acid and digestive enzyme levels as we age can make it more difficult for us to properly digest a food. This means it is still relatively undigested when it reaches the bowel, leading to bloating, diarrhea, cramps and other irritable bowel like symptoms as the bad bacteria in the gut have a field day. Reflux medications often make this situation much worse.

Gut lining health (leaky gut)

When the integrity of the lining of the digestive tract is compromised it can lead to a situation termed leaky gut. This often happens post a viral sickness, food poisoning, stress or having consumed antibiotics or something that has irritated the gut (like NSAID anti-inflammatory drugs). Having leaky gut allows toxins, bacteria and whole proteins to enter the blood stream, confusing the immune system. The immune system sees these things as non-self and goes in for the attack, allowing allergic, hyperactive and autoimmune types of conditions to be expressed.

Microbiome balance

When the colony of microbes in your gut are unbalanced (usually due to poor diet, stress or illness) this too can lead to the development of symptoms from eating foods you once had no issue with.

FODMAPs

FODMAPs are certain classes of natural foods that are often found to be the culprits of irritable bowel symptoms. People who suffer from FODMAPs issues usually find that eliminating the foods in the category they have an issue with clears up their IBS symptoms. However, the FODMAPs diet was never meant to be long term. Usually a FODMAPs issue arises due to one of the above changes in the digestive tract. The idea is to temporarily remove the food, allowing the digestive system to heal and recover. After a period of 1-3 months, slow reintroduction of the food should occur without issue.

Food diversity is so important

Eliminating a food permanently is not getting to the underlying reason of why that food is causing issues. Limiting foods long term has been shown to reduce quality of life and in some cases may even worsen health. This is mostly because good health is correlated with a good diversity of the microbes in your gut (your microbiome). The more diverse the variety of natural foods you eat, the more diverse your microbiome and the better your general health.



The good news

The idea is to eliminate the offending food or foods for a period of time while working on healing the gut lining, righting digestive insufficiencies and adding diversity and harmony to the gut microbiome using certain nutrients, herbs and probiotic strains. Once the healing is complete, the foods can be added back in one at a time to ensure they are now tolerated. If you have irritable bowel issues or food intolerances you would like addressed, see me for a tailored treatment plan.