

Michael van Straten

Bodytalk

EXCLUSION DIET

People do have allergies to specific foods like shellfish, eggs, milk, nuts and strawberries, but most side effects after eating, especially those that happen between one and twenty-four hours later, are caused by food intolerance. Apart from milk, which is a common problem, other foods which may produce adverse effects include coffee, tea, cocoa, chocolate, cheese, beer, sausages, some canned foods, yeast, red wine, wheat, and even tomatoes.

Migraine, asthma, eczema, hives, irritable bowel syndrome, colitis, Crohn's disease, hayfever, rheumatoid arthritis and menstrual problems are just some which may respond to dietary manipulation. Unless food culprits are obvious, in which case you should avoid them, an exclusion diet is the best starting point.

It might look difficult, but you only need to follow it rigorously for about two weeks, after which foods may be added back, provided you keep a record. You will soon be able to build a list of foods to which you are tolerant and eliminate the others. Stick rigidly to the diet for a fortnight and keep a diary to pinpoint bad reactions. After two weeks things should improve, but if not, food intolerance is probably not your problem so get further medical help.

The following are the foods which you may and may not eat during the first two weeks of the exclusion diet:

	Not allowed	Allowed
Meat	preserved meats, bacon, sausages, all processed meat products	all other meats
Fish	smoked fish, shellfish	white fish
Vegetables	potatoes, onions, sweetcorn, aubergine (eggplant), sweet peppers, chillis, tomatoes	all other vegetables, salads, pulses, swede (rutagaba) and parsnip
Fruit	citrus fruit e.g. oranges, grapefruit	all other fruit, e.g. apples, bananas, pears
Cereals	wheat, oats, barley, rye, corn	rice, ground rice, rice flakes, rice flour, sago, rice breakfast cereals, tapioca, millet, buckwheat, rice cakes
Cooking oils	corn oil, vegetable oil	sunflower oil, soya oil, safflower oil, olive oil
Dairy products	cow's milk, butter, most margarines, cow's milk yoghurt and cheese, eggs	goat, sheep and soya milk and products made from them, dairy and trans fat-free margarines
Beverages	tea, coffee (beans, instant and decaffeinated), fruit squashes, orange juice, grapefruit juice, alcohol and tap water	herbal teas (e.g. camomile), fresh fruit juices (e.g. apple, pineapple), pure tomato juice (without additives), mineral, distilled or deionised water
Miscellaneous	chocolates, yeast, yeast extracts, artificial preservatives, colourings and flavourings, monosodium glutamate, all artificial sweeteners	carob, sea salt, herbs, spices, and small amounts of sugar or honey

After two weeks introduce other foods in this order: Tap water, Potatoes, Cow's milk, Yeast, Tea, Rye, Butter, Onions, Eggs, Porridge Oats, Coffee, Chocolate, Barley, Citrus fruits, Corn, Cow's cheese, White wine, Shellfish, Natural cow's milk yoghurt, Vinegar, Wheat and Nuts.

Only try one new food every two days and if there is a reaction, don't try it again for at least a month. Carry on with the list when any symptoms stop. Any diet which is very restricted puts your health at risk and though it's alright to experiment on your own for a few weeks, any long term removal of major food groups should only be done under professional guidance.