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How to do an elimination/ challenge diet.

Purpose

The purpose of the elimination/challenge diet is to uncover potential food allergies or sensitivities. The elimination phase of the diet gives the immune system time to rest and the body time to heal. The challenge phase of the diet is designed to reveal which foods your body is sensitive to.

It is extremely important to fully eliminate foods in the elimination phase, and to reintroduce foods slowly and systematically in the challenge phase.

Step 1: PLAN

Work with your healthcare provider to learn which foods may be causing problems. There are several variations of the elimination diet:

Option 1: Eliminate foods according to a diet diary or food journal

1. Carefully document all foods you eat over the course of 7 days (including at least 2 weekend days). Document your mood, any symptoms you may be having and any additional outside influences that may be affecting the results of your diary.
2. Circle the foods which correspond to days that you have symptoms.
3. Proceed to the elimination phase of the diet by eliminating circled foods, as well as any food which you suspect is a trigger.

Option 2: Eliminate foods according to a blood test (IgG, optional IgE if signs of hives/anaphylaxis have been present.)

1. *Note: the reliability of IgG blood tests is unknown. For some patients the IgG food sensitivity test results very closely match their symptoms AND their*

elimination/challenge diet provocation. For other patients their symptoms do not correlate with blood tests in any way. It is very important to understand that IgG blood tests simply provide a **roadmap** in which to continue down a complete elimination/challenge diet. The roadmap gives us a place with which to begin eliminating foods without having to restrict a patient's diet to the extreme. **The gold standard for discovering food sensitivities is to complete an elimination/challenge diet**, regardless of the results of a blood test.

2. U.S. Biotek, Genova and Great Smokies laboratories all provide IgG food sensitivity testing which have produced good clinical results. Order one of these tests through your naturopathic physician.

Option 3: Eliminate the “top 10” most common food allergies or sensitivities:

Wheat and gluten-containing foods	Most breads, spaghetti, noodles, pasta, most flour, baked goods, durum semolina, farina, gravies, spelt, barley, modified food starch, malt.
Cow's dairy products	Milk, cheese, butter, yogurt, sour cream, cottage cheese, whey, casein, sodium caseinate and any foods containing these.
Soy	Soy, tofu, tempeh, soy sauce, soy protein, soybean oil.
Eggs	Egg whites and yolks, albumin, baked goods.
Cane sugar	White or brown sugar, candies, soda, cakes and cookies (unless sweetened with honey, maple syrup or stevia)
Peanuts	All peanuts, peanut oil, peanut butter.
Corn	Corn products (chips, popcorn, some cereals), any product with corn oil (assume “vegetable oil” is corn oil unless otherwise specified), corn syrup
Nightshade vegetables	Tomatoes, potatoes, eggplant, peppers
Yeast	Bakers and brewer's yeast (avoid breads, beer, any leavened product)
Coffee and alcohol	Caffeinated AND decaf coffee, all wine, beer and spirits.
Additives and flavorings	Artificial colors, flavors, preservatives, texturing agents, sweeteners, sulfites and nitrates.

Step 2: Eliminate

Follow the elimination diet *without any exceptions* for at least 30 days. Note: it is incredibly important to fully eliminate foods for 30 days without any “cheating.”

Read Labels: Examine all labels carefully to look for hidden ingredients. For example, if you are avoiding dairy products, you need to check labels for whey, casein, and lactose. Be particularly cautious if you are eating out, since you have less control of what goes into your food.

Food Journal: During elimination, it is very important to keep a journal to track your diet and symptoms so that your healthcare provider can monitor your results.

Go for high quality: You may get better results with the elimination diet if you eat only organic, pesticide free produce, legumes and grains. Choose organic, free range or grass fed meats. Avoid artificial ingredients, added colors, hydrogenated oils and deep fried foods.

Watch for withdrawal symptoms: Withdrawal symptoms may occur during the first few days or week on the diet. Withdrawal symptoms typically include fatigue, irritability, increased hunger, headache or body aches. Additionally, some or all of your symptoms may increase temporarily. These symptoms may be lessened by:

- o Drinking clean, purified water or herbal mineral teas
- o Taking baths with Epsom salts
- o Rubbing warm castor oil on the abdomen
- o Taking buffered vitamin C (calcium ascorbate) - 1,000 mg up to four times per day. (If approved by your physician.)
- o Doing gentle exercise or steam saunas to increase sweating.

Watch for resolution of symptoms. You are looking for a complete or very significant reduction in symptoms by the end of the 30 day trial. If symptoms have not resolved you may want to consider eliminating additional foods or abandoning the elimination/challenge diet. It **is** possible to continue to the reintroduction phase of the diet without symptoms improving, but it is typically much more difficult to unmask true food sensitivities.

Follow-up with your physician before beginning the reintroduction phase.

Step 3: Reintroduce

Reintroduce foods **one at a time**, starting with the foods that you suspect are “safe.” Test the most pure sources of a food (e.g., cream of wheat rather than bread) to eliminate possible cross-reactions.

Day 1 of reintroduction phase:

1. Eat 2-3 servings of the food you wish to test at least twice in one day. It is very important to eat significant quantities of the food (e.g., two scrambled eggs for breakfast, two poached eggs for dinner).
2. Write down any symptoms you have in a food journal.

Days 2 and 3:

1. Go back to eating only the foods allowed on your elimination diet.
2. Write down any symptoms you may have in a food journal - some symptoms take up to 3 days to manifest after challenging the food.

Day 4 (and beyond):

1. If you have had **no symptoms**: add the challenged food back into your diet on a regular rotation.
2. If you have had **mild symptoms or are unsure**: wait 7 days (from the beginning of the reintroduction) and retest.
3. If you have had **very significant symptoms - this is considered a positive food sensitivity or food allergy**. Remember that you are looking for a *significant* worsening of symptoms. Remove this food permanently for at least 6 months before rechallenging.

Continue this process for each food. **Wait for all symptoms to resolve before reintroducing another new food.** Always wait 4 days before introducing new foods, and never introduce more than one food at a time. If you have had no symptoms with the previously challenged food, then days 2 and 3 can include this food as well.

Possible symptoms:

General: Fatigue, anxiety, depression, insomnia, food cravings.

Gastrointestinal: constipation, diarrhea, abdominal cramping, blood in stools, vomiting.

Dermatologic: Acne, eczema, psoriasis, canker sores (aphthous ulcers), hives.

Rheumatologic: Muscle aches, joint pain.

Neurologic: Migraines and other headaches, numbness.

Miscellaneous: Asthma, migraines, elevated blood pressure, frequent urination, teeth grinding, bedwetting, infantile colic, nasal drip or nasal congestion.

Foods to use for reintroduction:

Gluten	Rye, barley or non-gluten-free oats.
Wheat	Cream of wheat, crackers or yeast-free, dairy-free, egg-free bread.
Cow's dairy products	Start with yogurt. Recommend challenging hard cheese and soft dairy products (milk, soft cheeses, whey) separately.
Soy	Tofu or tempeh
Eggs	Recommend egg yolks first, then egg whites (introduce separately)
Cane sugar	Unrefined cane sugar (add as sweetener to any baked product, tea or drink)
Peanuts	Peanuts or peanut butter.
Corn	Fresh ears of corn or frozen corn.
Nightshade vegetables	Tomatoes, potatoes, eggplant, peppers - introduce each separately.
Yeast	Bakers and brewer's yeast - introduce separately and preferably alone (e.g., 1 tablespoon of bakers yeast mixed in water)
Coffee and alcohol	Introduce decaf coffee first, then caffeinated coffee, then spirits, then beer, then wine.
Additives and flavorings	Recommend continuing to avoid or eliminate completely. Can rechallenge individual food dyes by using McCormick's or French's food dyes, add 5-10 drops in water and drink.