

# Diet and Lifestyle Recommendations for Autoimmune Disease

While autoimmune disease may not be completely curable, removing the triggers can often lead to a significant reduction in symptoms or even complete remission. Use the following guidelines to remove the triggers from your diet and lifestyle.

## Remove foods that may trigger or exacerbate an immune response

Follow a basic Paleo diet with the additional foods removed completely:

- **Eggs** (both yolks and whites)
- **Nightshade fruits and vegetables:** potatoes, tomatoes, sweet and hot peppers, eggplant, tomatillos, pepinos, pimentos, paprika, cayenne pepper (but not black pepper)
- **Dairy products** (with the exception of ghee)

These are all healthy foods when well tolerated, but they may provoke or perpetuate inflammation in those with autoimmune disease. That said, not everyone with autoimmune disease will have trouble with them, so the key is to experiment to determine where you fall on that spectrum. Take them out for a full 30 days, then reintroduce one at a time to see which ones you react to, starting with egg yolks, then egg whites, nightshades (do them one at a time), and finally dairy.

## Increase your intake of nutrients that promote optimal immune function

- **Glutathione** – To support the production and recycling of glutathione, increase your intake of:
  - **Protein** – aim for at least 15 percent of calories as protein (75 grams on a 2,000-calorie diet or 95 grams on a 2,500-calorie diet)
  - **Collagen-rich animal parts (skin, cartilage, and bone)** – these foods contain glycine, which is needed for glutathione synthesis and recycling
  - **Polyphenol-rich fruits and vegetables** – berries, peaches, pears, pomegranates, purple sweet potatoes, broccoli, garlic, cabbage, and spinach
  - **Selenium-rich foods** – Brazil nuts, ocean fish, and poultry
- **EPA and DHA**
  - Consume at least one pound of cold-water, fatty fish per week, such as salmon, mackerel, herring, and sardines

- **Vitamin D**
  - The best food sources of vitamin D are cod liver oil, cold-water fatty fish, and pastured duck and chicken eggs. Make sure you're regularly eating these foods!
- **Other nutrients** – Several other nutrients directly or indirectly contribute to glutathione synthesis and immune health, including niacin (B3), riboflavin (B2), pyridoxine (B6), vitamin C, magnesium, iron, copper, zinc, and manganese. The best way to optimize your intake of these nutrients is to focus on foods with the highest nutrient density:
  - Organ meats
  - Herbs and spices
  - Nuts and seeds (preferably soaked and dehydrated first to maximize nutrient absorption)
  - Cacao
  - Fish and seafood
  - Fresh vegetables
  - Red meat, pork, and poultry
  - Eggs and dairy (provided you tolerate it)
  - Seaweed

## Increase your intake of foods that support a healthy gut microbiota

- **Fermented foods** – fermented foods contain beneficial bacteria and yeasts. These probiotics don't just support gut health—they also regulate and balance the immune system. Aim for at least a small amount of fermented foods with each meal.
- **Fermentable fibers** – Soluble fibers naturally found in fruits, vegetables, starches, and nuts and seeds provide a food source for the beneficial bacteria in the gut. Starches like potatoes, sweet potatoes, plantains, taro root, and yuca are particularly good sources of soluble fibers. Note: some people with gut issues may benefit from reducing intake of fiber for a time.

## Make lifestyle changes that can aid your recovery

- **Exercise** – Regular aerobic exercise and strength training have been shown to increase glutathione levels in both healthy and sick people. Exercise also releases chemicals called endorphins. Endorphins are similar in chemical structure to morphine and opium, and they're responsible for the "runner's high" that some people experience with intense exercise. However, we now know that endorphins also play an important role in regulating the immune system. Endorphin levels are low in animals with autoimmune disease, and medications that increase circulating endorphin levels improve autoimmune disease in humans.

- **Acupuncture** — There are two primary types of immunity: cellular and humoral. Cellular immunity is our first line of defense against pathogens like viruses and bacteria. It includes immune cells that directly attack and destroy these pathogens, regardless of whether or not the body has seen them before. Humoral immunity is our second line of defense. It involves immune cells that produce antibodies, which bind to specific pathogens that the body has been exposed to in the past. In autoimmune disease, there is often an imbalance between the cellular and humoral branches of the immune system, and acupuncture has been shown to restore that balance.
- **Pleasure and Connection** — Like exercise, pleasure and physical contact also produce endorphins, which have a regulatory effect on the immune system. But there's another less scientific reason to cultivate pleasure and connection when you're suffering from autoimmune disease: they provide an important counterweight against the pain and social isolation that people with chronic disease often experience.
- **Sun Exposure** — Exposure to sunlight (or UVA/UVB light in tanning beds) appears to be especially important for those with autoimmune disease. The more hours of sun there are where you were born, the lower the risk you'll develop multiple sclerosis (MS). Evidence for benefit from sunlight is strong for other autoimmune diseases as well, such as type 1 diabetes. Spend time outside in the sunlight as much as you can.