- Diet / Inflammation

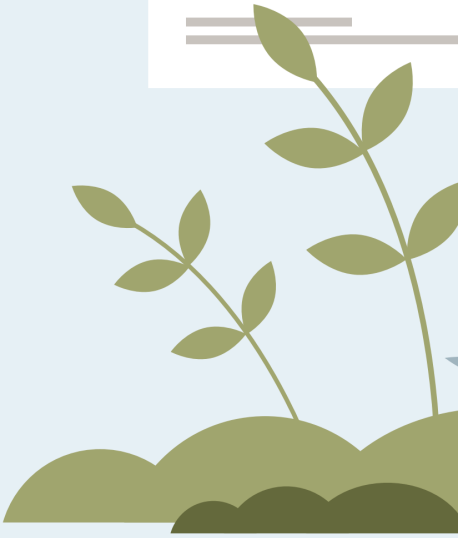
30 DAYS TO Anti-Inflammatory Diet

The elimination diet

Words: Rob Hobson

Every body is different, but if you can work out which foods trigger or exacerbate your inflammation, then you are one step closer to easing the problem





Inflammation is the body's natural defence mechanism, but when it lingers, it can contribute to persistent health issues, such as digestive discomfort, joint pain, skin conditions and fatigue. Some people may unknowingly consume foods that trigger or exacerbate inflammation, making it difficult to pinpoint the cause of their symptoms. One of the most effective ways to uncover these dietary triggers is through an elimination diet, which is a structured approach to identifying food sensitivities that may be impacting your health.



What is an elimination diet?

An elimination diet is a temporary eating plan that is designed to help identify food sensitivities or intolerances. During the diet you remove certain foods for a set period and then reintroduce them methodically so you can see how your body reacts. This process provides an insight into which foods may be causing symptoms, so you are able to make more informed dietary choices.

Unlike food allergies, which can trigger an immediate immune response, food sensitivities and intolerances often lead to more subtle symptoms that in some cases can still be chronic. These can range from digestive issues to skin flare-ups, headaches or fatigue.

The goal of an elimination diet is to:

- Identify foods that may contribute to inflammation and discomfort.
- Improve your wellbeing by reducing or eliminating problematic foods.
- Gain a clearer understanding of how different foods impact your body.

These diets can be highly effective, but you need to approach them with caution. Prolonged or unsupervised restriction of food groups could lead to nutritional deficiencies, particularly if key nutrients such as calcium or fibre are eliminated without proper substitutions. It is best to undertake an elimination diet under the guidance of a registered nutritionist or dietitian.

How to do an elimination diet

The elimination diet has three phases: preparation, elimination and reintroduction. Each phase plays a role in identifying and confirming food sensitivities.

STEP 1: PREPARATION

Before you start an elimination diet it's important to prepare correctly to ensure the process is properly organised and goes smoothly. Consider the following:

Track your symptoms: Keep a journal of any symptoms you experience, such as bloating, headaches, skin irritation, or fatigue. This baseline helps to track reactions or improvements during the diet.

Set a timeline: Commit to the elimination phase for 2-4 weeks. This timeframe allows potential triggers to

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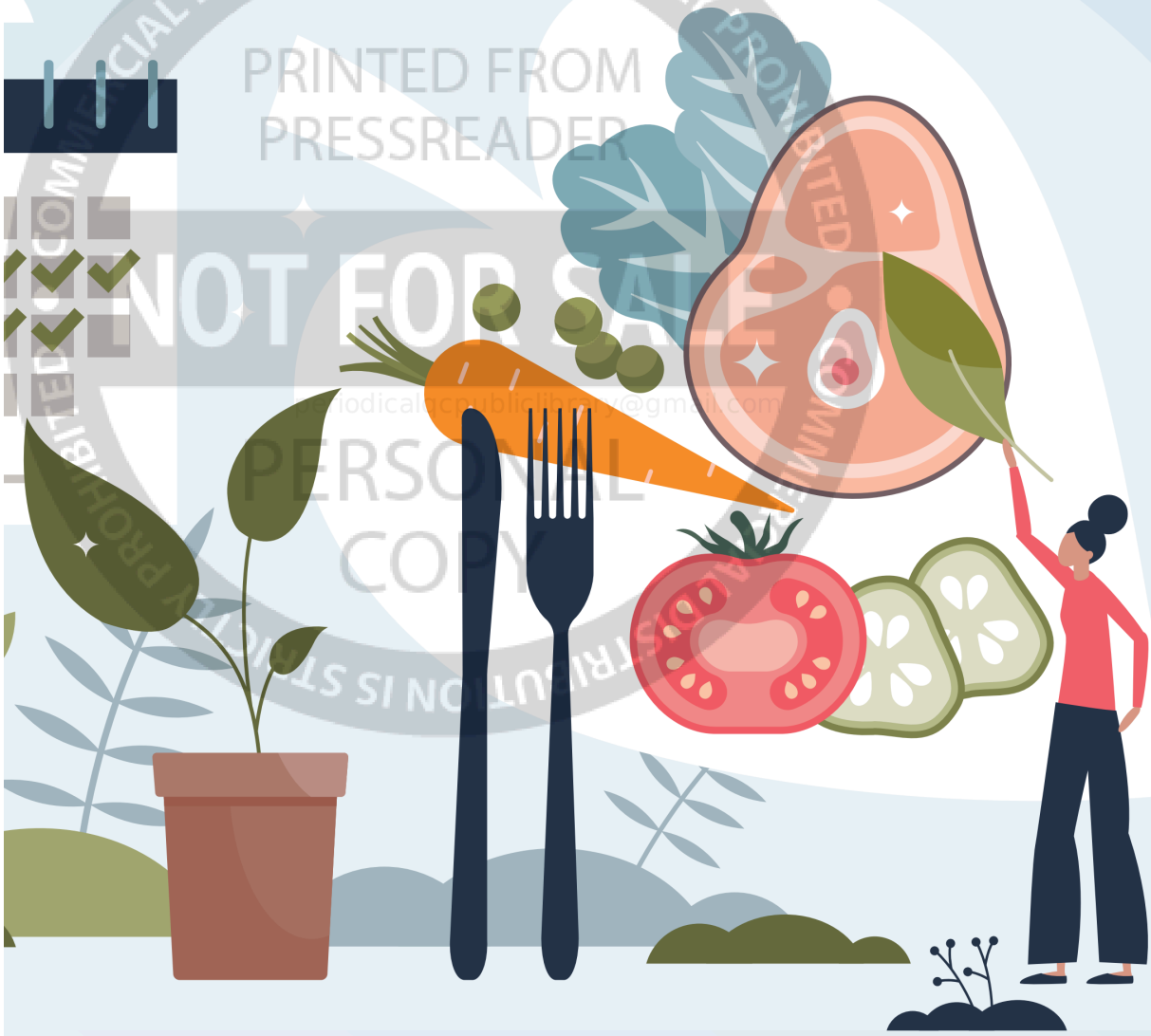

clear from your system and provides a clearer picture of symptom changes.
Plan your meals: Stock up on whole, minimally-processed foods to make meal preparation easier and reduce the temptation of restricted foods.
Seek professional guidance: If you have underlying health conditions or dietary concerns, consulting a registered nutritionist or dietitian can provide additional support and ensure your diet remains nutritionally balanced.

STEP 2: ELIMINATION PHASE

During this phase there are some common trigger foods that may be removed entirely from your diet. These often include:
Dairy: Milk, cheese, yoghurt, butter and cream.
Gluten: Wheat, barley, rye and many processed foods.
Soy: Soy milk, tofu, tempeh and other soy-based products.
Eggs: Both egg whites and yolks.
Nuts and seeds: Particularly peanuts and tree nuts.
Nightshades: Tomatoes, potatoes, peppers and aubergines.
Ultra-processed foods: Anything containing artificial additives, preservatives or sweeteners.

During this phase you should focus on nutrient-dense, whole foods like fresh vegetables, fruits, lean proteins (such as fish, poultry, legumes), and healthy fats (such as olive oil, avocado). Ensure you're eating enough to maintain energy levels while avoiding restricted foods.

While elimination diets can help identify specific triggers, they don't necessarily work for everyone. Research suggests that their success largely depends on an individual's unique physiology and the specific symptoms being addressed. These

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diets are also effective in managing diagnosed food sensitivities rather than preventing them.

STEP 3: REINTRODUCTION PHASE

After the elimination period, you'll start reintroducing foods one at a time. This phase is essential for identifying trigger foods and it requires careful tracking.

Select one food to reintroduce: Choose a single food group, such as dairy or gluten, and consume it two to three times over one day.

Monitor symptoms: Observe your body's response for 48-72 hours. Look for digestive changes, headaches, skin reactions, fatigue, or mood shifts.

Evaluate: If symptoms occur, remove the food again and note it as a potential trigger. If no symptoms arise, it's likely safe to include in your diet.

Repeat with other foods: Gradually reintroduce each eliminated food group, allowing a few days between trials to ensure you get clear results.

What comes next?

If you identify a food sensitivity, you can adjust your diet accordingly to reduce symptoms and inflammation:

Remove or limit trigger foods: If certain foods cause reactions, eliminate them or consume sparingly.

Find suitable substitutions: Swap problem foods for alternatives (such as fortified plant milk instead of dairy, rice instead of grains with gluten in).

Seek expert support: A registered nutritionist or dietitian can help create a balanced eating plan that meets your needs.

If you don't identify any specific triggers, then consider other factors that might be affecting your well-being, such as stress, sleep quality, or underlying health conditions. Regardless of your findings, maintaining a diet that's rich in anti-inflammatory foods like vegetables, berries, oily fish, nuts and seeds can always help.

The elimination diet is a powerful tool for uncovering hidden food sensitivities and regaining control over your health. The process does require discipline and close observation, but the benefits, which may include improved digestion, increased energy, and reduced inflammation, can make the effort worthwhile. It is important that you try to keep your diet as balanced as possible when you are eliminating foods, to ensure that the process does not result in nutritional deficiencies.

Whether you identify specific dietary triggers or simply gain a greater awareness of how food affects your body, this approach can empower you to make informed, long-term dietary choices that improve your overall health and general wellbeing.

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