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Beyond Elimination: A Guide to Testing Foods

After you've completed the elimination diet (e-diet) and you feel a reduction or clearing of symptoms, you can now test foods, one by one, to add to your base of safe foods on the e-diet. Here are the rules:

1. The new foods must be in their whole, unprocessed form.
2. When testing, allow four hours before testing another new food.
3. Up to three foods can be tested each day if there is no reaction.
4. To be clear, if there is no reaction, you add the food you tested to your repertoire of safe e-diet foods.
5. Everything must be tested by itself, along with your already determined safe foods. Don't test two new foods at the same time.

I recommend that you first test foods that you think will be safe so that you can test three per day and quickly expand your safe foods. Test foods you want to commonly include in your diet and don't worry about obscure foods that you rarely come into contact with. Keep a food diary of exactly what you ate and when. While the great majority of reactions to foods occur within 4 hours, there are some that are delayed. You'll find yourself referring back to your food diary as you sort out your reactions to foods. Reactions to foods come in different shapes and sizes. They include:

- Joint and muscle pain
- Stiffness
- Swelling
- Headaches
- Mental fog
- Anxiety
- Intestinal distress
- Sleepiness and fatigue.

FIRST TEST FOODS FROM THIS GROUP, IN ANY ORDER, ONE BY ONE:

Vegetables, meats, seafood, seaweeds, eggs, fruits, nuts (not cashews or peanuts, which are legumes), spices, oils, vinegars.

THEN TEST FOODS FROM THIS GROUP, IN ANY ORDER, ONE BY ONE:

Brewer's yeast, baker's yeast, beans (dried and cooked, not canned, with the exception of soy), cashews, peanuts, fermented vegetables like plain sauerkraut or pickles (I mean the vegetables that have active bacterial cultures, such as homemade ferments, or Bubbies brand. Not the vegetables preserved in vinegar).

THEN TEST THE FOODS THAT ARE MORE LIKELY TO CAUSE A REACTION:

- These include soy, dairy (milk, cheese, and butter, from cows and goats), and all grains you want to test.
- With dairy and grains, you must wait 3 days to test any new food because the reaction can be delayed.
- So for example, if you are testing milk, drink milk three times a day, then wait for 2 days to be certain you are clear.
- If you get a reaction sooner, stop testing it and wait until the reaction clears.
- Milk often causes respiratory, nasal, sinus, digestive, and skin reactions.
- Be sure to test fermented dairy separately (cheeses, yogurt, kefir) so that you get a good read on dairy PLUS the bacterial or mold (cheese) cultures.
- To test wheat alone, a plain shredded wheat cereal can be used.

Try to get through this testing process as speedily and efficiently as you can. You don't want to drag it out, so be persistent and committed and don't make any exceptions. Usually, this testing process can be completed in 3 to 5 weeks, so the whole elimination diet takes about a month to 6 weeks. You'll need to find the right time in your life to commit to this. I guarantee that you won't regret it because the information you will uncover is invaluable. It will be clear. It may surprise you.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

What if I'm not sure that I'm having a reaction?

Ask the clinician that's helping you. Otherwise, pull the food out of your diet for 5 days and retest it.

What if I interpreted a food as safe, but I was wrong?

If this happens, it could be because you extended the testing period too long. It's common to develop a degree of "maladapted" tolerance to an antigenic food over time. This increased tolerance will lessen your reaction and with it your ability to perceive it as a problem. If you perceive it as safe and include it with your safe foods, you may gradually feel worse over time. If you ever suspect this has happened, it's an easy fix: eliminate the suspect food for five days. You may experience withdrawal symptoms for a couple of days, followed by a clearing of symptoms and a return to prior wellbeing. If this happens, it's very likely that you are sensitive to that food. It may still be worth testing it after five days.

What about sweeteners?

Go ahead and test sweeteners individually. Just as with foods, test the ones that you plan to include in your diet.

What about alcohol?

Test alcohols individually. It's a tricky one because alcohol tends to be a mixed substance, containing yeast, bacteria, and other fermentation ingredients. Some of the hard alcohols tend to be tolerated better. Vodka tends to be the most well tolerated, and you can get vodka that is potato-based instead of grain. Gin and tequila follow. The whiskeys and brandies and cognacs are more complex. Beer and wine can be the most complex. Different wines and beers will have different fermentation components. Beer is not free of gluten. Some people find that certain wines are okay, such as organic wines without sulfites, or white wines as opposed to red, or red wines as opposed to white. Some people will do better with older more expensive wines, and some people to better

with cheap ones! Just test these things one by one and observe your reaction. You won't always know what you are reacting to within an alcoholic beverage, but you can make your best guess. As far as mixers, fresh and simple ingredients are easier to test and better tolerated than mixers from a bottle with additives.

Speaking of additives, how do I test for them?

This is a great question! Additives can include preservatives like citric acid, thickeners like guar gum, a flavoring agent such as MSG, and dyes. I recommend not consuming processed foods to the best of your ability. That being said, if there is a common additive such as guar gum, citric acid, or carrageenan, that you really want to test, you'll probably have to test a safe food that contains that ingredient. For example, If you want to test guar gum, and coconut is safe, then test canned coconut with guar gum.

Additives can really be a problem for certain people or certain conditions. I am not dismissing the importance of examining this.

What if I never "clear" my symptoms?

If you never experience a clearing of your original symptoms that led you to do the e-diet, address the reasons for this phenomenon with your clinician, and then try the elimination diet later, or move to laboratory testing. Some people do not experience a clearing. Reasons for this include:

1. There's underlying small intestine or large intestine bacterial or yeast overgrowth or dysbiosis, or a parasite, and this is clouding the results of the test. This is the most common reason.
2. There could be a chronic infection elsewhere, or a problem with metals, mold, or environmental toxins that is clouding the results of the test.
3. Very rarely, you may be allergic to one of the foods on the list of safe foods.