

Going Cold-Turkey: Anti-Histamine Diet Basics and Starter Menu

(Just don't actually eat any cold turkey)

Welcome! If you are reading this, bless you. This may feel complicated and overwhelming at first. But, like most things, it gets easier with practice. I promise that it will be worth your time. As you learn the basics, you'll be able to develop more creativity and flavor based on your own preferences with new recipes and transformed family favorites. Food is community, and in spite of the need of many patients with hypermobility syndromes, EDS, MCAD/MCAS, autoimmune and other inflammatory conditions to have a strict diet, we believe in doing our utmost to make that diet inclusive. That means, we want your family to like eating this way too!

Personal note from the author: I grew up one of three kids with a single mom who worked six jobs at a time while homeschooling us, because, no matter what, homeschooling was her dream. Money is always tight, but what I've learned for me and my family on our journey to stability is that teaching my mind and body to be OK with buying quality fresh foods, spending a little more for nicer cuts of meat which we then portion carefully and NEVER waste, is not just an investment in MY health, but for all of us. My son no longer has asthma, my daughter's chronic skin rashes, scabs and upper respiratory infections are GONE and we only had ONE stuffy nose in the last TWO years. I'm able to keep my MCAD stable with minimal drug intervention which is balancing my nervous system and allowing for gut healing that doctor's are amazed by. There is no doubt in my mind that my kids are also on the Ehlers-Danlos spectrum, and the peace of mind we have knowing that this is controlling their inflammation and could prevent a lifetime of pain, is worth the sacrifice of my and my husband's time and energy.

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If you don't yet have a copy of the food lists for anti-histamine diets, please download them and keep them on hand. Let me briefly summarize the logic of an anti-histamine diet.

1. Your body is filled with mast cells. Mast cells are an essential component to your immune response! But they can become overly sensitive, "twitchy," be too many of

them, or have a condition in which they trigger themselves uncontrollably. Mast cells are naturally triggered by environments, drugs, foods, injury, and inflammatory conditions. If they are more “twitchy” than normal, or you have a condition which causes them to react with greater quantity to a trigger (like autoimmune diseases or mastocytosis), it can be extremely difficult to decrease the damage and pain they cause.

2. One of the ways we can control mast cell response is by altering our diets and environments to prevent mast cell triggers from causing a reaction. Histamine is a mast cell, most known for its role in allergies. By controlling histamine intake, histamine releasing foods, and foods which block the enzymes your body needs to break it down when it IS released or consumed, we can drastically reduce the triggers and ergo, inflammation.
3. Many common FRESH foods contain small to substantial amounts of histamine that your body can no longer metabolize fast enough. You might eventually be able to have a serving of one of these every month or so, but definitely NOT until your gut is healed and your mast cells are stable.
4. ALL processed and fermented foods are insanely high in histamine. Failing to cut these from the diet will cause all other efforts to fail.
5. Some common foods may not contain histamine, but naturally trigger the existing histamine in your blood to be released.
6. The enzyme DAO (Diamine Oxidase) is produced by the kidneys, and is responsible for breaking down histamine in the blood. It is one of the body’s natural mast cell controls. Some people do not produce enough DAO due to kidney damage. Some people may have a genetic deficit in DAO. Others are consuming so much histamine rich foods that the normal DAO production cannot compensate.
 - a. This latter possibility is the most common, and occurs with both of the former. Additionally, when the body is inflamed from a medical condition, the other mast cells are agitated so that even normal production and a clean diet (no processed foods) are not enough to prevent histamine triggers. Many very clean foods are high in histamine; spinach, citrus, walnuts, fresh shellfish, tomatoes, etc.
 - b. *(DAO deficiency and other genetic conditions like hereditary histamine intolerance, can be tested for. Typical blood tests for histamine problems are to measure histamine in the blood serum, serum tryptase test and urine tests for n-methylhistamine. However, some conditions (hypermobility spectrum disorders in particular) cause mast cell activation symptoms without the clinically positive tests. This can be labeled Mast Cell Activation Disorder versus Syndrome).*

In a world where many things are out of our control, making dietary changes is most definitely within our control. By controlling and maintaining a diet very low in histamine, with supplementation to work AGAINST excess histamine responses from our environments, we can turn our inflamed, exhausted bodies into a canvas for health and healing.

A brief added note for families from a mother of two. Whether your children have been diagnosed with hEDS/GJHS or another autoimmune or hereditary condition, creating an anti-

histamine diet foundation for the family can resolve IBS symptoms, boost the immune system function, reduce if not illuminate allergies and asthma without drug intervention, and prevent a hereditary condition from developing into what we now live with every day as moms.

Foundation Principles for Anti-Histamine Diets

Liquids and Caffeine

*Water: make this a constant. Multiply your weight by 2/3rds to reach a minimum amount of water per day by ounce.

Caffeine triggers mast cells. If you cannot eliminate coffee and other caffeine sources completely for the first month of this diet, try to drink no more than 1 cups of 1/2 caff in the morning and make any other coffee decaf with no more than 3 total cups per day. Most tea has high histamine plant additives that have also been preserved with chemicals or by drying. Stick with varieties of peppermint and mint. You might like to add fresh ginger and maybe a little local honey.

Meat

**Most meat, while not full of histamine initially, increases in histamine as it ages, with cooking, and after cooking. You must only eat fresh meat. Fresh meat is either literally fresh (just killed and butchered), or freshly frozen (frozen within 30 minutes of butchering or catching/gutting). On an anti-histamine diet you need to become very picky and knowledgeable about the differences in your meats and their manufacturing.

1. Buy as far away from the expiration date as possible, and then freeze it ASAP. I portion steaks and buy chicken tenders for easy lunch.
2. When you take meat out to defrost it needs to be cooked ASAP, do not leave it sitting out very long. *I put mine in cool water but always start it cooking when it's still partially frozen to keep histamine low. Do not use a microwave to defrost!!!*
3. Larger meat portion options are a roast chicken or beef chuck roast. Pressure cooking can make quick work of both with delicious results.

Your food lists will say this but it bears saying again.

1. NO Shellfish. NO fish that eats junk food (tilapia). These meats already contain high levels of histamine and will only develop more as they defrost and cook. *My children are fine with tilapia once a week, though if allergy season hits I may skip it for a few weeks to lessen any stress on their immune systems.*
2. NO PORK. Meat allergies are considered rare, but there is strong research which connects mast cell conditions to the development of meat allergies. While some people may be able to tolerate fresh pork in moderation, with no histamine seasonings or sauces, most pork products are preserved. NO PORK.
3. Avoid ground meats.

Finally, if you must eat meat that you are unsure of, be sure to take your quercetin and DAO enzyme supplement before hand. Black seed oil is also a very safe natural antihistamine and

anti-inflammatory oil that has saved me from a mast cell flare many times. Pepcid can be taken to help prevent a systemic reaction, though this diet does not advocate self-medication in any way (*This is always true for meat but may also be true if you happened to feel a reaction like nerve pain, brain fog, sniffing, itching etc. after eating something you thought was safe in another food category.*)

More Common Elements

***No Dairy, No gluten. Avoid soy like the plague. It's very high histamine and blocks the kidney production of DAO enzyme that breaks down histamine.

- *I have a few exceptions to this which I discuss below. And let's face it. If there weren't, you'd eat them anyway. I'd prefer that you "cheat" safely rather than end up ruining your progress or causing harm to your system.*

****Sugar should not exceed 65mg/day as the norm. More than this triggers inflammation. You can have more occasionally (once or twice a month) once inflammation has settled.

What does "In Moderation" mean for someone with histamine/mast cell challenges?

I have asked this question of nearly 100 people. By averaging out the responses and factoring in the severity of their different conditions, the consensus is:

One to two NO-NO foods per MONTH.

That is ONE food, ONE time, with the space of 30 days.

WITH supplements, and possible medication support.

Keep that in mind when you think about how seriously to take this diet. To help, I've included some of our favorite recipes for safe treats, comfort foods, and more

Starter Menu

Breakfast:

1/3 cup whole or instant oats, 1.5 tbsp hemp seed, blueberries, 1/2 tbsp butter, 1 tbsp maple syrup and maybe some almond milk if it needs help. If you need to increase calorie intake, increase to

½ cup of oats. (Since sugar is kept under 65mg, it is not in your best interest to try to lose weight by eating a smaller portion, or forgoing the maple syrup. The different types of sugar are necessary for brain functioning as are the healthy fats in this meal).

- You may add your daily serving of nuts to the oatmeal. Sulfite free raisins and shaved carrot can also make tasty additions.
- *Parents: my children eat pretty much the same thing. They love making it themselves, and don't mind the hemp seeds! They also prefer local honey to my maple syrup. Occasionally we get some plain Cheerios and they can add honey to that too, but oatmeal first! And a piece of fruit. While bananas are absolutely NO for us, some children can tolerate them once or twice a week without developing symptoms. Runny noses, phlegmy cough, tummy aches and sneezes are our first signs of too many bananas.*

Lunch:

Freezing small portions of meat ahead of time eases this process considerably.

4-5 oz of fresh meat (two chicken tenders, half an average sirloin cut, a filet of beef, a piece of lamb).

- Bake or cook on the stove top quickly. (If frozen, do not defrost completely). Season the meat with your Himalayan salt and place in a piping hot pan with olive oil (olive oil will shimmer when ready and may slightly smoke). Flip the meat when browned, and only once. Cook on opposite side for equal time.
- If making chicken, you can season with herbs before putting in the pan. For beef cuts, add herbs with butter after cooking on the second side for several minutes. Baste to finish and let rest after reaching internal temperature. (Beef – med rare starts resting at 140-145, med starts resting at 145 to 150. Chicken starts resting at 155-160. These temps assume you have a very accurate thermometer).

Add Toast with butter or gluten free crackers. Rice and quinoa. If not freshly made it can be eaten if made only the day before with no added sauces.

- *The kids love making their own breakfasts now (7 and 8 years old), but they REALLY love their lunch routine. Gluten free bread (avoiding potato starch as much as possible), almond butter, honey sandwiches. A Persian cucumber each, carrots or lettuce leaves, and a glass of water, almond milk too if they've had enough water. Getting them on a lunch routine makes my life so much easier with the cooking I have to do for myself. And since they like what I eat too, I can make some for them if we're out of bread, or whip up their favorite eggs instead. There is nothing wrong with a repetitive routine for children 😊*

Veggies: 2 Sticks of celery and 2 medium carrots, or a salad with lettuce, carrots, celery and cilantro. Shot of wheatgrass blend (no green powders with spinach. Some options listed below).

- *Since vinegars are now off limits, adjust to eating veggies raw, blanched, boiled or roasted with salt, olive oil and any herbs you enjoy. The reward for your dedication will be enjoying a nice salad at a restaurant every other month or so without getting sick.*

Dinner:

Fresh meat! An alternate option from lunch. For our family we have a chuck roast in the oven or pressure cooker, roast chicken, tacos with chicken, steak or ground beef and a DAO tablet. Homemade pizza (recipe below). Gluten free Pasta (sauce recipe below). Or breakfast for dinner!

- *Often, children can still have eggs even if they are prone to mast cell issues. If in doubt, have their blood serum tested. Otherwise, scrambled or fried eggs are whipped up to help with tired lunches and dinners. Work great for the hubby too.*
- *As a more petite woman, I often find that I don't care for two servings of meat each day. If this is you too, or becomes you, you may like to switch out your lunch or dinner with one of the following. As my inflammation decreased, I could handle the fresh, low histamine dairy products more regularly. It's also nice to just get my veggies and add collagen protein to some decaf coffee or a shot of milk instead.*

Wild rice, pink rice, quinoa, or corn tortillas (once a week only). Toast. Pancakes or waffles (We love the King Arthur flour gluten free pancake mix. I add chia and almond extract, even golden flax flour. This is the only time I eat eggs).

Veggies: Asparagus (is a high FODMAP food so limit to twice a week at most), sweet bell pepper, kale, a bunch of plain lettuce or a salad, WHITE onion, celery, carrots. Roasted zucchini.

- *For parents: We have always been low sugar with our kiddos, and the family rule is TWO bits of a new thing every so often. I teach them that food has both taste and texture, and those can sometimes be changed if I know which one is the problem. Since they are autistic, providing the means to communicate discomfort is essential. The result has been that they eat most veggies raw, cooked and otherwise with little to no complaint. They are allowed to tell me if they don't like something, provided it's done with kindness (we prefer kindness, maturity and love to politeness, appropriateness and "because I said so" vocabulary). After listening I'll often say "Ok. Finish it today, and I won't make it for you that way again."*
- *There are many ways to help your children learn to eat what you serve, and learn to deeply appreciate the beauty of food and flavors. Even if they are autistic! Reach out to me if you need more ideas.*

Dessert: *I've made a few recipes below for cookie dough, toffee and some creative "cheat treats." These are the basics. And the best part is, you can usually have a lot of them throughout the day, all day!*

Blackberries, blueberries, homemade toffee with nuts, cookie dough, a small serving of Daisy brand cottage cheese (it has no additives or preservatives), a small serving of FRESH goat cheese on toast with berries or honey.

- *A quick note on desserts. These should NOT be consumed daily, but there are a few other goodies that are low histamine, if not low sugar, and knowing you can have them can help your emotions too.*
- *Gluten free baked goods – watch out for walnuts, chocolate, cinnamon and other spices, and anything with aged cheese or more than a teensy amount of citrus.*
- *Dairy Free gelato. We have a wonderful place nearby that not only sells exclusively dairy free gelato in 15+ flavors, it's also clean. Most frozen food section dairy free ice creams are made from soy or nut bases that are most definitely NOT low histamine. Not to mention the added preservatives, fake sugars and more. Take time to find something clean based on your food lists, or make your own whipped frozen coconut cream at home with the toffee and cookie dough chunks.*

Snacks:

All nuts should be limited. Look at serving amounts and make about half of that your daily limit. The exception is if you're having two different kinds of nuts in which case half of each should be fine. Avoid roasted nuts if possible.

Pistachios, almonds are ok in small amounts and shouldn't be eaten daily. Pumpkin seeds. Gluten free crackers (check ingredients!). As many approved veggies as you like. Sparkling water with 1/4 cup of an approved juice (VERY SPARING because the sugar in the juice can trigger inflammation). Watch out for the “essences” in flavored waters. These can be triggering, even if it's supposed to come from an approved fruit. Some people can tolerate homemade popcorn once or twice a week. No more than 1/8 cup unpopped, drizzle with butter and coconut oil (we like a little of both melted together) and as much Himalayan salt as you need! (Fabulous for POTS). Homemade popsicles, smoothies,

Fats and Oils:

Grapeseed oil, olive oil, coconut oil and butter are ALL ok. Depending upon your cholesterol levels, lipid metabolism and weight, be more wary of the saturated fats. However, you've cut all processed foods and your body needs fats as much as it needs sugars. As long as you aren't drinking cups of coconut oil and butter, use it! Just get the olive oil or avocado oil in wherever you can. Also, Black seed oil twice daily will give you plenty of good fats as well (See additional supplements for more information on black seed oil).

When cooking with oils, avoid frying for long amounts of time in hot oils. Baking, roasting or pressure cooking are preferred. If you cook stove top in oil, get it hot so it doesn't take as long to cook. Eat immediately (beef can rest for a few minutes). Find someone else to eat leftovers and make yourself fresh food the next day. (Husbands are great for this! We love you guys).

Additional Supplements:

DAO Enzyme – take once a day. Take especially 10 minutes before consuming stove top cooked meats, ground meats, or meats with any histamine spice no matter how sparingly you’ve used it. Extra should be taken when having a special meal out, having a cheat dessert with dairy or gluten. ALWAYS take before eating any chocolate or high histamine fruits. You get the picture. (ie; Histamine Block).

Quercetin - a front line, natural anti-histamine. 2,000mg a day (four capsules) is what most immunologists recommend for histamine issues and for mast cell patients. It’s very safe for children at half this dose, one tablet morning and night.

Vitamin D - 10,000 iu per day is standard for autoimmune and becoming normal intake after Covid-19 info boosted awareness of vitamin deficiencies.

Amazing Grass Super Greens Booster– A green powder on Amazon that is all low histamine greens. Not easy since spinach is so common! But I take a servings of this a day. Helps keep nutrients up when my appetite is low.

Black Seed Oil – Backstory. I got very sick in Egypt, prior to diagnosis and having lived with these conditions untreated for a very long time. A friend who ran an organic farm gave me a bottle of fresh pressed black seed oil they had made and it saved my life. Black seed oil promotes healthy mucus production in the lining of the digestive tracts. It’s anti-inflammatory, equal to most CBD oils I’ve tried both topically and internally. 1 Tsp a day under the tongue and thrown back with a swig of black coffee to help the sharp taste. It will also help your vitamin E levels, omega fatty acids and more. I don’t like saying “wonder oil” but it is. And it’s cheap! Since I was brought up on the fresh pressed Egyptian stuff, I only buy from MAJU in the US, who source their seeds from Turkey. Other black seed oils I have sampled have not been as affective. It is also cold pressed which retains the most nutrients. They have a capsule version (if you go this route you need 2-3 per day). The straight oil lasts longer and can be easily mixed with coconut oil for your skin, or applied directly to sites of pain and swelling.

Our bodies all need something a little different. The above supplements are your go-to for mast cell issues. You will also need a good probiotic, and possibly extra vitamin C since you need to cut your citrus. I also take a b-complex from Biotics research that has about 12 different B vitamins in it, for energy and to support neurological dysfunctions. Low vitamin B6 and B12, and low vitamin E can cause neurological symptoms like nerve pain, headaches, brain fog, dizziness, and more.

Some supplements and supplement ingredients can trigger mast cell reactions, so do your research! And only test ONE KIND AT A TIME.

Recipes

Cookie Dough or Cookies– (converts either way in the blink of an eye)

1 C almond flour – *flexible amount*

2/3 C whole or instant oats *-flexible amount*

1 tsp baking powder

½ to ¼ tsp salt (as you like it)

1/8 cup almond milk (cuts down on the amount of maple syrup needed)

1-2 tsp vanilla extract (the REAL stuff).

Maple Syrup as needed.

Mix together with a fork and add maple syrup gradually until the mixture forms balls of dough that stick together with a spoon. Mixture will seem crumbly until you try sticking it together in a ball.

Add nuts if desired, or increase the fiber content with golden flax seed flour. Raisins (sulfite free). Chocolate chips (Dark with no milk) if you are only eating two or three times a MONTH and have not consumed other chocolate (chocolate contains histamine AND liberates it in the blood stream. Be sure to take some DAO before eating the cookies if you add chocolate).

Bake on parchment paper (if you don't use this the bottoms can burn). 350 oven for 10-12 minutes or until golden brown on the top and cooked throughout.

If you just want to enjoy some cookie dough, make a smaller portion, cut the baking powder and voila!

Tomato Free Pasta Sauce that is better than ANY store bought ragu.

1 large glass roasting pan (metal pans will impact the flavor of the sauce).

Oven at 400 F

Sauce Base:

Fill with quartered tomatillos (about 5 large or 8 small, quantity can vary depending on how much sauce you want). Diced white onion (1 whole min.). Quartered bell pepper (red or green). Coat liberally with olive oil, Himalayan salt and fresh or dried rosemary. 1-2 med. Cloves of garlic can be added for those who can tolerate it. More is NOT recommended regardless of tolerance.

You can leave this sauce base happy as is and skip to the next part of the recipe. If you want MORE sauce, you can add all sorts of veggies to this mixture to increase volume and flavor. You don't need to increase the amount of tomatillos to preserve flavor unless you are tripling the recipe.

Veggies to add:

Chopped Zucchini

Carrots

Cooked beets (NOT canned. If you've boiled some recently you can use these to help the sauce redden and add wonderful nutrients).

Dice the veggies before roasting so that they are easy to emulsify (puree, blend).

Cook until softened, fragrant, and slightly blackened on top. Turn on the broiler briefly to blacken for flavor if your roasting did not accomplish it.

Let contents cool for 10 minutes or less before pouring into a sauce pan for emulsifying, or into a heat tolerant blender to puree. Thoroughly emulsify the sauce so that no chunks remain, then simmer on low to remove excess moisture, stirring constantly to prevent scorching or splatter. ***Do not use a metal spoon in this process if you can help it! Metal changes the flavor when it interacts with the acids of the vegetables.***

You can now add the rest of your flavors! We like fresh basil, oregano or thyme. You can add a little coriander powder (a great substitute for taco seasoning too with oregano, thyme and salt). If the sauce is a little acidic for you (this depends on the quality of the tomatillo, a little honey can be added).

Bon appetite – spoon onto gluten free crust for yummy pizza, over gluten free pasta. It tastes amazing and you get a tremendous amount of veggies.

For kids who need to give up sauces due to histamine, blood serum allergies and other mast cell conditions, try cutting tomato sauces completely for a month before reintroducing this new sauce. Taste buds can adjust faster if they do not have a memory of the food they think they will miss.

Toffee –

There are some incredible recipes for homemade toffee and I do not have the perfect one. But here are some toffee basics to get you started.

Butter and brown sugar are your base. Dark brown sugar, sulfite free. You can use regular butter or cocoa butter (highly nutritious) or a blend of the two. Toffee needs to be cooked up to a certain temperature, but you can also eye ball it. It will bubble happily while you stir and then begin to cling and become syrupy. You can also see the granules at first and then see them disappear. To test, dip a spoon or knife into the hot mixture and let cool to observe how it hardens.

Once ready, pour onto a heat tolerant surface. Silicon sheets or parchment on a raised, double layer cookie sheet (raised on a cookie rack or hot tablet). Use a silicon spatula to spread or gently tip the pan and allow the caramel to run. You can also let it cool slightly and roll it or pull it to thin.

Add your toppings as soon as possible and let harden! Edible within minutes

Tips: You can add a liquid, alcohol based flavoring to the butter and sugar right at the beginning. Tiny amounts of vanilla or another liquor. The alcohol will boil off and the flavor remaining is not enough histamine to affect you.

If you want salty toffee, do NOT add the salt at the beginning! It super charges the temperature and will burn your sugar.

Cheesy Exceptions –

We all miss cheese. None more than me. 8 years of only the occasional bite and boy, those were heaven. Until I learned about histamine levels in the cheese I was usually eating. Dairy has been shown to increase fatigue and symptoms in autoimmune and inflammatory conditions, and so has gotten a bad wrap. However, once your body inflammation is under control (which will take a few months at first!) You may be able to add some FRESH cheese or super clean fresh Greek yogurt once a week.

- Fresh goat cheese (not aged)
- Daisy cottage cheese (lowest additive cottage cheese on the market and NOT aged)
- Fresh Ricotta (ricotta is often called “fresh” but has actually been sitting on the shelf. If you need a treat cheese for a dessert, find it at a local Italian mercato.

Anti-Histamine Diet Food Products to Help You Out

King Arthur Flour - gluten free flour, pancake mix, corn bread mix (high in sugar and corn should be limited).

Simply Mills Almond flour, Cauliflower Pizza Dough – Pizza dough in a box

KC Naturals – AIP diet approved BBQ sauces, seasonings, pasta sauce, ketchup, mustard and more. All made without inflammatory spices and nightshades. *Canned sauces of Any kind should be avoided like the plague. These are an exception, but consumers should check for AIP approved but NOT anti-histamine approved spices like black pepper and garlic, and eat sparingly with DAO and probiotics.*

Organic Supergreens Powder from Amazing Grass- *The larger containers all have spinach and other high histamine ingredients. This one is a small 10-12 dollar bag and will have no spinach.*

Thank you to the many who have contributed to our family's knowledge and awareness of naturally addressing mast cell issues. We hope what we have learned and adapted to will assist you on your journey, be it with family or flying solo. Fly free!

-Rachel Lee Davis May 2021