

Low Histamine Diet

Histamine is a chemical compound which plays a role in several of the body's major systems, including the immune, digestive, and neurological systems but also in the body's natural inflammatory response. Some people develop histamine intolerance which needs dietary management.

Histamine intolerance is believed to only affect 1% of the population. Genetics play a role but certain medical conditions, such as Crohn's disease, GERD, liver conditions and leaky gut can increase a person's risk. Taking some over-the-counter drugs can also interfere with the enzymes that break down histamine and increase histamine sensitivity. These include:

Theophylline	Muscle relaxers	Gastrointestinal
Heart medications	Pain medications	medications
Antibiotics	(aspirin, naproxen,	Alcohol
Antidepressants	indomethacin,	Malaria and TB
Antipsychotics	diclofenac)	drugs
Diuretics		

People with histamine intolerance may experience a wide variety of symptoms such as headaches, fatigue, nasal congestion, hives and swelling, diarrhoea, nausea, abdominal cramping.

The body sources all the histamine it needs from our own cells, but it also appears in some foods. As there is no reliable test available to use to diagnose histamine intolerance, it is often best to follow an elimination diet to determine if there is a sensitivity. This involves removing foods from your diet for a minimum of four weeks, then slowly re-introducing them back in one at a time to see how your body responds. There isn't such a thing as 'histamine-free diet' but you can learn which foods trigger a greater histamine reaction than others and learn where your histamine threshold for certain foods lies.

Histamine Foods

General pointers

- Histamine levels in foods vary, depending on how ripe, matured or hygienic the foods are.
- As much as it is possible, only buy and eat fresh products.
- Avoid or reduce eating canned foods and ready meals.
- Avoid or reduce eating ripened and fermented foods (older cheeses, alcoholic drinks, products containing yeast, stale fish).
- Don't allow foods to linger outside the refrigerator — especially meat products.
- Ensure that your food preparation area (kitchen) is always kept clean — but don't be manic!
- Everyone has their own threshold; you will need to find yours.

Low histamine foods

- **Fresh meat** (cooled, frozen or fresh).
- **Certain fresh / frozen fish** — hake, trout, plaice.
- **Chicken** (cooled, frozen or fresh).
- **Eggs**.
- **Fresh fruits** — except for plantains, most fresh fruits are considered to have a low histamine level (*also see histamine liberators below*).
- **Fresh vegetables** — except for tomatoes, aubergine and spinach.
- **Grains** — also products thereof such as rice noodles, white bread, rye bread, rice crisp bread, oats, puffed rice crackers, millet flour, pasta.
- **Fresh pasteurised milk and milk products**.
- **Milk substitutes** — goat's milk, sheep's milk.
- **Cream cheese, mozzarella, butter**, (without the histamine generating rancidity).
- **Most cooking oils** — check suitability before use.
- **Most leafy herbs** — check suitability before use.
- **Most fruit juices without citrus fruits**.
- **Herbal teas** — except for those listed below.

High histamine foods

- Alcohol.
- Aubergine.
- Pickled or canned foods — sauerkraut, kimchi etc.
- Matured cheeses.

- Smoked meat products — charcuterie, salami, ham, sausages etc.
- Shellfish.
- Beans and pulses — chickpeas, soy flour.
- Long-stored nuts — e.g., peanuts, cashew nuts, almonds, pistachio.
- Chocolates and other cocoa based products.
- Seitan.
- Rice vinegar.
- Ready meals.
- Salty snacks, sweets with preservatives and artificial colourings.

Histamine liberators

Whilst these foods are not high in histamine, they help release histamine from other foods.

- Most citrus fruits — lemon, lime, oranges etc.
- Cocoa and chocolate.
- Walnuts, peanuts.
- Papaya, pineapples, plums, kiwi and bananas.
- Legumes.
- Tomatoes.
- Wheat germ.
- Most vinegars.
- Additives — benzoate, sulphites, nitrites, glutamate, food dyes.

Enzyme blockers

Diamine oxidase (DAO) is an enzyme that helps break down excess histamine in your body; some foods block DAO:

- Alcohol.
- Black tea.
- Energy drinks.
- Mate tea.

Debatable histamine triggers

- **Yoghurt** — depends on the bacteria culture used.
- **Egg white** — The theory that egg white is a histamine releaser has been dismissed but there still maybe individual differences.
- **Yeast** — even though it does not contain histamine as such, yeast can serve as a catalyst for histamine generation during leavening of items such as bread. Yeast extract has been reported to be a DAO inhibitor and, therefore, is not deemed suitable in the low-histamine diet.