

Salt intake is significantly reduced when processed foods are eliminated, so table salt can safely be used to add flavour to meals on a low chemical diet.

Cholesterol intake is reduced by cutting out processed foods. It can be further reduced by trimming the fat off meats, discarding chicken skin, and using low-fat milk. Use polyunsaturated oils and margarines where possible.

Vegetarians need to choose suitable alternatives to provide the necessary proteins. Suitable low-chemical legumes include lentils, chick peas, soya and kidney beans. Combining these with dairy foods, cereals and/or nuts and seeds will provide all the essential amino acids.

Pregnancy and breast-feeding will increase your requirements for calories, iron, folic acid and calcium. See your dietitian for detailed advice.

common misconceptions

Popular diets come and go, based on whatever alternative theories are currently in fashion; for example, hypoglycaemia, food family rotation, Candida, leaky gut and liver detoxification. These diets generally eliminate all additives and a wide range of foods that are rich in natural chemicals, so it's not surprising that people with food intolerance who follow these diets often feel better; at least temporarily.

This is also true of so-called 'yeast-free', 'wheat-free' and 'sugar-free' diets. If your health improves on one of these diets, it's easy to jump to the mistaken conclusion that yeast, wheat or sugar must have been the culprit. If you find that sweet foods, such as cakes, honey, jam and chocolate, upset you, it's likely to be due to the natural chemicals and/or additives in them rather than the sugar. In fact, white (refined) sugar is perfectly safe for sensitive individuals, because any natural chemicals that might cause reactions have been removed in the refining process.

There is a common belief that dairy products are bad for people with 'allergies'. In fact, this is not usually so. If you feel better avoiding dairy it may be because you've cut out the natural amines in tasty cheeses and chocolates, or the flavourings in yoghurt, ice-cream and milk shakes. Milk or wheat can sometimes irritate the stomach and bowels in people with food intolerance, but this will often settle down after the relevant food chemicals have been identified and eliminated for a few weeks.

Lactose intolerance is a genetic difficulty in digesting lactose, and can cause bowel symptoms. However, it's not usually necessary to exclude all dairy products, as most people with lactose intolerance can tolerate small quantities of milk and yoghurt. If you react to cheese (which contains no lactose) you're likely to have intolerance to food chemicals other than lactose.

Once you know which foods you can tolerate safely, apply these general principles:

VARY the foods you eat from day to day as much as possible

EAT MOST bread, rice, potato, and other cereals, fruit and vegetables

EAT MODERATELY meat, fish, chicken, dairy or soy products (or vegetarian alternatives)

EAT LEAST fats and oils

DRINK MOSTLY water

MAINTAIN a steady, acceptable weight

