Steer Clear of These Foods if You Have Lupus: Immune Stimulating Foods

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Foods to Avoid with Lupus

We are what we eat, right? Researchers at Oxford certainly think so; they recently found that diet can affect DNA and genes. While eating better is likely to help you feel better overall, it can be challenging to figure out what a healthy diet looks like for someone with lupus.

You can start by following the general recommendations for a healthy diet, adding good foods, limiting or removing others, and seeking advice from your doctor and nutritionist. A healthy diet is not a cure, but it is an important part of your overall treatment plan for lupus.

How Can Diet Help Manage Lupus?

Every food we eat has an impact on our body. With lupus, we want to consume foods that have positive effects and avoid foods that increase inflammation and lupus flares. A nourishing diet can help to:

- lower inflammation levels
- reduce or minimize symptoms
- reach or maintain an ideal body weight
- lessen medication side effects
- keep muscles and bones strong
- reduce the risk of heart disease and kidney disease
- increase periods of remission
- improve physical and mental well-being

Furthermore, people with lupus have been able to reduce their fatigue levels by losing weight with a low-glycemic-index or low-calorie diet. Check with your doctor to confirm your ideal weight, as too much weight loss can further compromise your immune system or lead to malnutrition.

What to Add to Your Diet

Overall, doctors recommend a diet of roughly 50% carbohydrates, 15% protein (or around 50g per day, unless you have kidney disease) and 30% fat. You'll need to find healthy sources for these proteins, carbs and fats that work for you.

The key to a good diet is variety. Try to eat as many different healthy foods as possible. Aim for lots of fruits, vegetables, lean meats and whole grains (such as brown rice, quinoa, or whole grain bread).

Other things to add to your lupus diet include:

- Good fats: good unsaturated fats include monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats.
- Omega 3 fatty acids, which have been shown to have a therapeutic effect on disease activity with lupus; salmon and mackerel are recommended, as well as walnuts, flaxseeds and olive oil.
- Calcium: especially if you have osteoporosis or if you're on corticosteroids that may cause bone thinning.
- Vitamin D: many people with lupus have low levels due to photosensitivity. Vitamin D deficiency has been associated with more severe disease activity.
- Folic acid: some medications, such as methotrexate, decrease folic acid levels.
- Iron: people with lupus are often anemic.

Ask your doctor to monitor your vitamin levels, take supplements if needed and try to avoid any deficiencies.

What to Limit or Remove from Your Diet: What Foods Make Lupus Worse?

While there are many foods that you should limit, there is one category of foods to avoid with lupus that should be avoided entirely: immune stimulants. Anything that increases the activity of the immune system is likely to cause lupus flares.

Some immune stimulants include:

- **Alfalfa sprouts**: these have an amino acid (L-canavanine) that can activate the immune system and has been observed to cause lupus flares.
- **Garlic and lupus don't mix well**: while likely okay in small amounts, large portions of garlic may increase white blood cell activity and thus increase the body's defenses.
- **Alternative cold and flu treatments such as echinacea or elderberry**. These herbal immune-strengthening agents are found in many forms — including additives in cough drops — so be sure to read labels carefully.

Foods you may want to limit include inflammatory foods, salt, bad fats, alcohol and possibly nightshade vegetables.

Inflammatory foods

It has not been proven that inflammatory foods increase lupus symptoms, but it is still suggested to avoid or limit these foods if you have an inflammatory disease. Some examples are fried foods, refined grains, processed foods and foods high in sugar.

Sodium

Too much sodium may increase the inflammatory response in SLE, raise blood pressure and exacerbate kidney issues. Try to consume less than 2,300 mg daily of sodium; those with lupus nephritis will need to have an even lower sodium intake.

Bad Fats

A low-fat diet may help prevent heart disease; people with lupus are 50 times more likely to have a heart attack compared to the normal population. Carefully limit saturated fats, trans fats and cholesterol.

Taking corticosteroids often leads to high cholesterol and blood sugar levels, so following a low-fat diet can help minimize these side effects.
However, the kinds of good, healthy fats discussed earlier should still be included in your diet.

Alcohol

Depending on your medications, you may be able to drink in moderation. Red wine may be good for your heart, especially when combined with a healthy diet. If you do choose to drink, do so carefully and only with your

doctor’s guidance.

Nightshade Vegetables

Some people have observationally found that nightshade vegetables, including eggplant, tomato and potatoes cause an increase in their symptoms. It may be helpful to monitor your reaction to these foods.

Your list of foods to avoid could be longer. If you suspect you have food triggers, consider trying an elimination diet to figure out which foods seem to make your symptoms worse.

Your Diet During a Lupus Flare

A flare is going to be a particularly hard time to eat well, since there may be physical limitations to your shopping, cooking or eating. No one likes to plan for flares, but making sure you’ll have easy access to healthy foods is a good start. Try keeping some of your favorite soup tucked away in the freezer.

If you’re able to eat healthier during a flare, then the nourishment will hopefully help your body recover more quickly.

How to Maintain a Healthy Diet with Lupus

I’ve always been a picky eater, and that has made healthy eating more difficult for me. In addition, I frequently suffer from nausea and lack of appetite. When I don’t feel like eating it’s harder for me to choose healthy foods.

I’ve tried to overcome this by stocking a variety of foods and quality snack options as well as keeping pre-cooked foods in the freezer. I also make smoothies often, as they are easier to consume when I’m nauseous. Plus, smoothies are a good way to sneak things like flaxseed, oatmeal and spinach into my diet.

Since I dislike most seafood, I regularly take a high-quality fish oil supplement to get enough omega-3s. If you have a similar issue, I recommending using Labdoor to check which fish oil supplements are safest (mercury content can be an issue).

My diet is still a work in progress, but I will keep trying to improve it. I want good eating habits to become second nature for me and to see a long-term reduction in my inflammation, symptoms and disease complications.

Has a healthier diet had a positive impact on your life with lupus? Let us know!