CreakyJoints’ Guide to
Diet for Crohn’s Disease
& Ulcerative Colitis

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What You Should Know

If you have an inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) like Crohn’s disease or ulcerative colitis, you may be struggling with what you can and can’t eat. The answer isn’t always clear. While there is no proof that any diet causes Crohn’s disease or ulcerative colitis, some foods and beverages can worsen symptoms, especially during a flare. Though you cannot cure IBD through diet, learning to avoid certain food triggers may help in managing the disease and its symptoms such as gas, bloating, abdominal pain, cramping, and diarrhea, particularly during flares.
Many people with Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis have difficulty absorbing nutrients because their small, or in some cases small and large intestines are inflamed. As a result, they can have loss of appetite, weight loss and even become at risk for malnutrition. If you have had problems absorbing nutrients, it's wise to follow a high-calorie, high-protein diet, even if you don't feel like eating. Eating regular meals is also important, along with two or three snacks daily, to make sure you get enough calories, protein and nutrients. You may find that eating several small meals daily may make you feel better than eating three large ones, because smaller meals are easier for your gut to digest.
Common **Trigger Foods**

When it comes to determining which foods trigger or worsen your symptoms, everyone is different. Some people find it useful to keep a daily diary of what they eat and how these foods make them feel, to help them determine which foods are their personal triggers. A diary can also help your doctor or a registered dietitian determine if you're eating a balanced diet. Typically a diary will note the foods/beverages that you consume each day and the serving sizes, as well as any symptoms you experience after eating.

Once you've determined the foods that trigger your symptoms, you can either eliminate them completely from your diet or, in some cases, prepare them in ways that will make them more tolerable for your digestive system. For example, if high-fiber raw vegetables are a problem, you can try steaming, boiling, or stewing them. While fiber is often recommended to the general public for a healthy digestive system, it can actually worsen symptoms in some people, especially in those who have narrowing in the bowel. Cooking vegetables makes them easier to digest. If red meat triggers flares, try eating a leaner cut of beef like ground round, and instead of fried chicken, try it grilled without the skin.

*Certain foods have been identified that tend to trigger symptoms more so than other foods. These include:*

- **Caffeine** *(coffee & tea)*
- **Butter, mayonnaise, margarine, oils*
- **Carbonated beverages**
Alcohol

Chocolate

Corn husks

Spicy foods

Red meat & pork

Fatty & fried foods

Dairy products

High-fiber foods (whole grains & bran)

Raw vegetables

Nuts & seeds (peanut butter or other nut butters)

Gas-producing food (lentils, cabbage, legumes, beans, broccoli, onion)

Raw fruits
Low Residue Diet

You may have heard the phrase “low residue diet.” It means a diet that reduces or eliminates high-fiber foods that add residue to the stool, such as corn hulls, nuts, raw fruits, seeds and vegetables. “Residue” in this context means undigested food, such as fiber, that comprises the stool. In people with IBD who have a narrowing of the lower small intestine, a low-fiber with low-residue diet can help lessen abdominal pain, cramping, and diarrhea by reducing of the size and number of daily bowel movements. However, this diet is generally recommended for short-term use only, such as during a flare or after surgery.

When you eliminate lots of foods, as you do with a low-residue diet, you increase your risk for malnutrition. Thus it’s important to find other foods to replace the calories and nutrients from the foods you are avoiding – nutrient-dense options that you can tolerate that will also help you maintain a healthy weight. A dietitian can make suggestions for what do add to your diet that you may not have thought of.

Following are some foods that are generally considered okay to eat if you’re on a low-residue diet (though not an exhaustive list).

- Applesauce, canned peaches or pears (seedless & skinless)
- Well-cooked, seedless vegetables, fresh or canned (asparagus tips, beets, green beans, carrots, pumpkins, & spinach)
- Cooked potatoes without the skin (not fried)
As for beverages, decaffeinated coffee, tea, and carbonated beverages; juices made without pulp or seeds; and strained vegetable juices are fine to consume on a low-residue/low-fiber diet.
Vitamin Supplements

Vitamin supplementation may be necessary to replenish vitamins and minerals that you are not getting from food. For example, many people with IBD have vitamin D deficiency. A study published in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine found that taking 1,000 to 2,000 IU of vitamin D daily may reduce the risk of colon cancer, which can be higher in people with crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis. High-calorie, vitamin enriched beverage products that are designed to supplement or replace meals may also be helpful in giving you the calories and nutrients you need while letting your intestines rest. There’s also some evidence that omega-3 fish oil and probiotics or “good” bacteria may be helpful to take in supplement form.

You may find that some of the foods and beverages on the list of foods to avoid may be okay for you, while some foods on the “recommended” list may nonetheless trigger your symptoms. That’s why it’s important to work with your doctor and/or nutritionist. You should also talk to them before adding any new vitamin supplements to your diet. Ultimately you may need to experiment to find a diet plan that works for you. If you’re thinking about making significant changes to your diet by either adding or eliminating foods, talk to your doctor or nutritionist first to make sure you’re following a healthy plan.
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