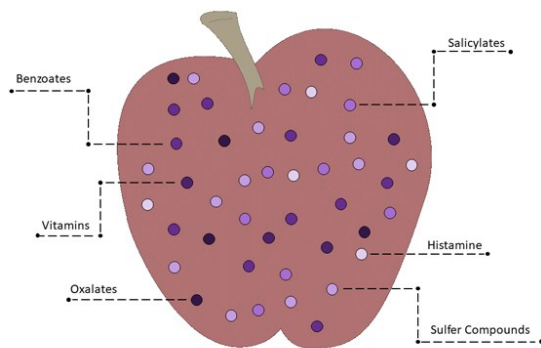


# Sensitivity to Natural Food Compounds



You've probably seen the natural food compound restriction lists – low histamine, salicylate, oxalate, etc. Unfortunately, natural food compound levels are inconsistent, so it is impossible to have accurate restriction lists.

## What are Natural Food Compounds?

Food is composed of hundreds of naturally occurring compounds. Most are nutraceuticals with documented health benefits. However, some people may be sensitive to them. The most common compounds that people associate with food sensitivity are histamine, salicylates, oxalates, sulfur compounds and benzoates.

## Why Are Natural Food Compound Restriction Lists Inconsistent?

**The levels vary dramatically.** Natural compound levels vary from batch to batch and within the same food over time. For example, histamine levels rise as food starts to spoil. Ground chicken is low in histamine, but even slight contamination during processing or storage increases histamine. One study showed that vegetables had substantial and unpredictable changes in histamine levels during storage.

Another example would be the many factors that impact salicylate levels. For example, an apple's salicylate level would be affected by the variety, growing conditions and possibly transportation.

Normally, the salicylate levels may be low and tolerable, but the occasional apple may have higher levels. See [An Objective Look at the Low Salicylate Diet](#).

**We don't have reliable laboratory tests to measure natural food compounds.** Even if we had good tests, it would still be a struggle to develop accurate lists, because the levels change over time.

**The internet lists have grown through speculation.** Since we don't have reliable tests, the restriction lists have been based primarily on anecdotal internet reports. For example, someone finds a low histamine diet helpful and assumes they have histamine intolerance. Blueberries bother them (I picked a random food), and they speculate that blueberries must be high in histamine or release histamine. If the individual shares their speculations on the internet, people creating low histamine diet lists may add blueberry.

**Other food compounds, such as gluten, are different.** There have been hundreds of research studies to develop a reliable method to measure gluten. Furthermore, gluten levels are fairly consistent within the same food (e.g. an average slice of bread has about 5 grams of gluten), and gluten does not change over time (i.e. the slice of bread will have 5 grams of gluten, regardless of the testing day).

## Problems That Result from These Lists

Natural food compound restriction lists can lead to problems, because:

**Health professionals often "diagnose" clients with a sensitivity to these compounds without any objective tests.** At this time, we do not have tests to diagnose a sensitivity to these compounds (tests are available, but they are not validated). It is okay for professionals to suggest that a client may be sensitive, and they may want to experiment with their diet. Unfortunately, professionals often tell clients they are sensitive and must avoid certain foods. These statements can lead to food fear and unnecessary diet restrictions.

**It can be frustrating when you can't find exact answers.** Readers often ask questions, such as: "Which is lower in histamine- white potatoes or sweet potatoes?" For the reasons described above, these questions are difficult to answer.

**The lists change our perception of food.** Seeing a list of "bad foods" will affect how you feel about those foods. With repeated exposure or discussion/thinking about these lists, your mind will eventually categorize many foods as "bad." It can happen at a subconscious level, so you may not even be aware of it. Eventually, this will lead you into the [Food Fear & Symptom Cycle](#).

**Your diet will be very limited if you follow more than one restriction.** I get a lot of e-mails for people wondering what they can eat if they are following several restrictions, such as low histamine, oxalate and salicylate. There's not much left! In many cases, clients get these restrictions from health professionals. One client had seen four different professionals in the month before we met and was desperately trying to follow four different dietary restrictions.

**When people find a food(s) that bothers them on a list, they may think they need to avoid the entire list.** Mary is a good example. She was having problems with tomato and alcohol and wanted to figure out why. Both foods are listed as high histamine (or histamine-releasing), so she assumed that she was histamine intolerant and needed to follow a low histamine diet.

## If you choose to restrict natural food compounds....

- ♦ *Use the list as a guideline.* For example, people spend a lot of time trying to figure out which is the best low histamine diet. It's a futile search, so pick one to start.
- ♦ *Find "your best" diet.* It is rare to find a diet list that fits perfectly. Most people find their own best diet through experimentation.
- ♦ *Determine if a restriction is helping or not.* It's common for people to follow a restriction – on-and-off, and never figure out if it is truly helping. If you are considering a restriction (e.g. low salicylate), choose a list and follow it closely for a time (e.g. three weeks). At the end of the time, decide if it has helped. If you are not sure, it probably has not made enough difference to justify the restriction.
- ♦ *Try one restriction at a time.* Following more than one restriction is difficult because:
  - 1) your diet will be very limited,
  - 2) if you notice a benefit, you won't know what restriction was helpful. For example, clients often start a low histamine diet and antihistamine medications at the same time. If they feel better, they don't know which one helped.
- ♦ *If a restriction is helpful, experiment to find your tolerance.* If you ask ten people on a low histamine diet what they can tolerate, you will get ten different answers. Everyone has individual tolerances, so experiment to find yours. Don't restrict a specific food just because it is on a list.



Not sure what to eat? We can [help you](#) break out of the Food Fear & Symptom Cycle and expand your diet.