

“How You Eat” May Be More Important Than “What You Eat”



If your symptoms get worse during meals, it is natural to search for specific food triggers. However, the physiological process of eating and digestion may be the culprit, rather specific food triggers. Changing dietary patterns (how and when you eat), may be more helpful than searching for illusive triggers.

The best food patterns are individual. Experiment to figure out what works for you! There are two ways to go about it:

- 1) Record a [Food and Trigger Journal](#) to see if you notice any connections between your dietary patterns and your symptoms (e.g. increased digestive symptoms in the evening on days you eat quickly at work).
- 2) Change your dietary patterns (one at a time) to see if your symptoms improve. A [written action plan](#) would be helpful.

Here are some dietary patterns that may influence your symptoms.

Volume, Frequency of Eating

Benefits of small, frequent meals, include:

- Stabilized blood sugar.
- Increased energy through the day.
- Reduced hunger. For some people, hunger can be a symptom trigger.

- Easier for the body to process smaller quantities of food.

Benefits of large, less frequent meals (e.g. intermittent fasting), include:

- Minimized meal-related symptoms (i.e. if eating is your only trigger, less frequent meals may reduce the amount of time you are symptomatic, and you can postpone symptoms (e.g. not eating at work, but at home, where you can rest)
- Reduced stress, if eating is stressful.
- Reduced dental cavities (if you are prone to cavities).
- Possibly reduced functional digestive symptoms.

Which theory is right? Who knows? Experiment to see if meal size makes a difference for you.

Time of Day

If you feel better eating at certain times of the day, honor that! Customarily, we eat breakfast, lunch, and supper at typical times. Don't get caught up on what your meal pattern should look like. It is important to find a meal pattern that works for you, even if others find it a little strange.

Meal-Time Beverages

If you suffer from diarrhea, a common recommendation is to avoid mixing solid food and beverages (e.g. drinking between meals, not with meals). Additionally, if eating/drinking large volumes bother you, drink between meals.

Eating Too Fast, Especially When You Are Tense

When you are relaxed, your body is in “rest and digest,” and is ready to process your meals. When you are tense, your digestive system does not function well. Additionally, if you are eating too fast and not chewing well, you are missing the first step of digestion. A double whammy! You may also swallow air when you eat quickly, which can lead to gas/bloating.

Take a few deep breaths before eating to shift your body into “rest and digest.” Remind yourself to take smaller bites and chew thoroughly.

Rotating Foods

Rotation diets are helpful for clients that tolerate food initially but lose tolerance if they eat the food frequently. By rotating foods, they can tolerate a much greater variety. Rotation diets can be a written plan (e.g. Day 1, Day 2, Day 3 with different foods on each day) or it can be a more relaxed (i.e. just remember not to eat the food several days in a row).

Food/Beverage Temperature

Extreme food/beverages temperatures may trigger symptoms in some people, especially those that are sensitive to body or air temperature.



Want to experiment with food patterns, but don't know where to start? I can [help you](#) create a simple plan and support you through the process.