

# Practical Guide to the Low Histamine Diet



The low histamine diet is a guideline based on an educated guess, not precise rules.

Many people follow a low histamine diet, on-and-off, without really knowing if it is helping. A systematic trial will help you determine it is beneficial.

The low histamine diet should be your only change. If you start a low histamine diet and new medications at the same time, and you feel better, you would not know which change was responsible for the improvement.

Eating a healthy diet is just as important as following the restriction. Consider booking an appointment with a registered dietitian to ensure you are eating nutritiously during your restricted diet trial.

The low histamine diet encompasses a few different theories, and it is helpful to test these theories separately. This approach will ensure you don't follow unnecessary restrictions.

**Step 1 (one week):** Cut out alcohol, because it is the most common symptom trigger.

**Step 2 (two weeks):** Eat your regular diet but follow "Minimize Histamine Formation during Food Storage." After two weeks, if these changes have not helped, leftovers are not a concern for you!

**Step 3 (two weeks):** Restrict fermented foods – such as aged cheese, yogurt, kefir, kombucha, kimchi, sauerkraut, tempeh, natto, aged sausage, etc.

**Step 4 (three weeks):** Follow the full low histamine diet – either my version (Wendy's Low Histamine Diet Guidelines) or a different one. Change your diet gradually over a few weeks. Sudden dietary changes are hard on the body.

**Note:** if a step is not helpful, continue to the next step, but include that step in your diet. For example, if step #2 - minimize histamine formation was not helpful, you can eat leftovers during step 3 and 4.

## Minimize Histamine Formation During Food Storage

Follow these guidelines strictly during your two-week trial. If it helps and you are planning to continue, experiment to see where you can ease up.

Food spoilage bacteria produce histamine (and other diamines). Readers often ask – how long can food be in the fridge, etc. Unfortunately, there is not an exact guideline. In summary, you need to follow the typical food safety guidelines for preventing food poisoning, but more strictly.

### Danger zone

Typical food safety guidelines suggest discarding food if it has been in the Danger Zone (4 – 60° C or 40 - 140° F) for more than two hours or in the refrigerator for more than 4 days. Bacteria grow rapidly in the danger zone and more slowly in the fridge.

## General Tips:

Don't worry about food that is low risk for spoilage, such as food that can sit at room temperature (e.g., chips, cereal, crackers) or food that can sit in the fridge for extended periods (e.g., mustard, jam, etc.)

Fruit and vegetables are often more problematic when they over-ripen. Histamine possibly increases (but this has never been tested, so it is only an educated guess). It is best to eat as fresh as possible:

- Buy small quantities and shop frequently
- Keep your produce in something designed to

maintain quality (e.g., produce bags with a paper towel, specialized container, etc.)

- When your fruit is at its peak freshness and just about to decline, dice it and freeze to use in smoothies.

Freeze individual meals and reheat them right before eating. You'll spend a lot less time cooking and doing dishes.

Be very careful not to contaminate food in your refrigerator. Use a clean utensil to take out what you need and put the food back in the fridge quickly.

Vacuum sealing removes oxygen and reduces bacteria growth. However, for the two-week trial, it is best to prepare fresh meals or freeze meals. If you continue past the trial, experiment with vacuum sealing.

## Purchasing Raw Meat

The tips below refer to "meat," but they also apply to any animal or fish.

High protein foods are probably more susceptible to histamine formation because they are high in histidine (the precursor of histamine). Therefore, take extra precautions with meat, especially raw meat (because it is very high in bacteria).

- Raw meat is highly contaminated, and bacteria grow very quickly if the meat is in the Danger Zone (see above).
- Ideally, purchase meat that has been butchered and frozen quickly.
- If you purchase fresh meat, make sure it has not been sitting for very long. Pick it up from the store soon after it has been delivered (call ahead and talk to the butcher).
- Pick up your meat at the end of grocery shopping, and keep it cool in an insulated bag. If it is fresh, add an ice pack.
- Avoid ground meat/chicken, unless it has been ground and frozen quickly. A chunk of

meat has bacteria on the outside, but grinding spreads the bacteria throughout the entire batch. Bacteria multiply quickly in ground meat.

- Avoid mechanically tenderized meat. Meat is poked with small blades to break down the tough fibers, but this contaminates the inside of the meat.
- Some internet websites suggest avoiding hung meat (e.g., beef). However, federally inspected plants hang meat at about 2<sup>0</sup> C (35<sup>0</sup>F) which is just above freezing so very little bacteria would grow. In some parts of the world, meat hangs at room temperature (avoid this meat).
- Fish that is gutted and cooled (or frozen) quickly would not be high in histamine. Most commercial companies, gut and flash freeze fish right on the ship.

## Cooking Meat

When you get home from the grocery store, freeze your raw meat or cook it. Don't let raw meat sit on the counter (or more than three hours in the fridge).

Thaw frozen meat quickly by:

- microwaving on low power
- put thin cuts of meat in a waterproof, sealed baggie and submerge in cool water. Keep checking and cook as soon as it is thawed
- place frozen meat in a steamer basket in a pot. Add water, bring to a boil and then simmer. The level of water should be below the meat (even when it is simmering). After thawing, you can continue cooking in the steamer basket or cook with a different method (e.g. pan fried).

You can freeze cooked meat, but it can be a little dry when you reheat. However, it works well to slice it and use in salads, wraps, etc.

Slow cooking meat is not recommended on the low histamine diet, because the meat may sit in the Danger Zone for an extended period. Pressure cooking is a better option. If you decide to slow cook:

- Heat the slower cooker before adding the food. Keep it on high.
- Heat the liquid (ideally boiling) before pouring in the hot slow cooker and then add the meat/chicken immediately after.
- Smaller pieces will cook faster than larger ones.
- Use fresh or thawed, not frozen.
- Brown the outside of the meat/chicken, before putting it in the slow cooker.

Marinating is potentially problematic because the meat sits in the fridge for several hours. Using a rub on the surface of the meat is a better choice during the two-week trial (salt and pepper even work). Once the two-week trial is over and if you decide to continue with the guidelines, experiment with marinating in a vacuum sealed container in the fridge.

# Wendy's Low Histamine Diet Guidelines

If you want to print these guidelines, use the download link at the top of the page.

My diet guidelines are less restrictive than most low histamine diets on the internet. The low histamine diet is an “educated guess, so this is not the “right diet.”

There is not enough definitive information to indicate “allowed” and “restricted.” Therefore, I’ve used “usually does not increase symptoms” and “commonly reported to increase symptoms.” **Use your judgement. Everyone has individual tolerances!**

	Foods that usually do not increase symptoms	Foods that are commonly reported to increase symptoms
<b>Milk Products</b>		
Fluid milk	Unflavored milk (any fat level) Unflavored lactose reduced milk	Flavored milk (e.g., chocolate) Buttermilk
Cheese	Unripened cheese, such as cottage cheese, ricotta, cream cheese, mozzarella (histamine may form while sitting in the fridge, so they should be vacuum sealed).	Ripened cheese (all those not listed) “Aged” cheese can have very high levels.
Other		Other fermented milk products Yogurt Kefir Sour cream
<b>Grains Products</b>		
Whole Kernel Grains	All (consume the majority of your grain products as whole kernel grains. This provides the best nutrition). Rice, quinoa, wheat/spelt, barley, oats, etc.	None
Bread, crackers	Whole grain crackers Muffin or loaf (unless there are restricted ingredients)	Many lists include bread as a high histamine food, probably because the dough is fermentation with yeast. Other fermented foods (such as cheese, sausage, and wine) contain high levels of histamine, so it is possible that bread does as well.
Cereals	Hot plain whole grain cereals Cold Cereals based on whole grains	
Cookies, cake	Moderation for good health	Chocolate chips and chocolate icing
Pasta, Noodles	All	
Other	Popcorn	

Foods that usually do not increase symptoms		Foods that are commonly reported to increase symptoms
Vegetables	All other vegetables	Tomato and tomato products Eggplant Pumpkin Sauerkraut Spinach Avocado  Sauerkraut (fermented cabbage) or kimchi (oriental fermented vegetables) Overripe Vegetables
Fruit	All others Many low histamine websites have a long list of fruit to avoid. However, the restricted fruit varies between lists. Fruit is nutritious, but limit to one serving (about ½ cup) per meal. Dried fruit (you can purchase dried fruit that is not sulfited, or you can dry your own). Limit dried fruit to about one tablespoon per serving. Many clients tolerate very fresh fruit and vegetables the best (when fruit starts to over-ripen, slice it, freeze and then use in smoothies).	Strawberries and raspberries Citrus fruit (lemon, lime, orange, and grapefruit) <i>Note: a small amount of lemon or lime as a flavor enhancer is okay.</i> Pineapple Overripe Fruit Excess dried fruit
<b>High Protein Foods</b>		
Meat and Poultry	Fresh meat or poultry (see special care for meat)	Processed meat products: luncheon meat, wieners, sausages
Fish/Seafood	Fresh fish (i.e., caught and cooked or frozen quickly).	Smoked fish Canned tuna Fish or seafood that has not been frozen
Eggs	Egg yolks are said to be okay, but it is tedious to separate eggs.	Egg White (Note: In my experience, most clients tolerate eggs, and they are a good source of protein. If you feel eggs are okay for you, limit eggs to less than one per day during the elimination diet trial).
Legumes	Dried beans and peas (black beans, chick peas, kidney beans) Lentils	Soy beans (e.g., edamame beans, tofu, many vegetarian products).
Nuts	All others	Walnuts (the <a href="http://www.histaminintoleranz.ch">www.histaminintoleranz.ch</a> list restricts all nuts and then says some are okay. It's not clear. They list walnuts as the worse)
Seeds	Hemp Seeds Flax Seeds Chia Seeds	Pumpkin seeds (restricted on Dr. Janice Joneja's list) Sunflower seeds (restricted on <a href="http://www.histaminintoleranz.ch">www.histaminintoleranz.ch</a> list)

Foods that usually do not increase symptoms		Foods that are commonly reported to increase symptoms
<b>Condiments</b>		
Spices & Herbs	All others	Cinnamon, cloves, curry powder, chili powder, nutmeg, anise, thyme (these spices are said to be high in salicylates and natural benzoates which are claimed to cause a histamine release)
Fats & Oils	Vegetable oil (coconut oil, olive oil, canola oil) Butter	Man-made fats (e.g., trans fats) promote inflammation in the body. Avoid margarine and vegetable oil shortening.
Sweeteners	Sugar (moderation for good health) Honey Stevia	None
Other	Plain vinegar Mustard Mayonnaise (It is restricted on many diets because it contains vinegar and egg white. However, most people tolerate it.)	Aged vinegar, such as balsamic Ketchup Fermented soy (e.g., soy sauce, miso)
<b>Beverages</b>		
Alcohol	None	All
Coffee/Tea	Coffee (less than 3 cups/day, as it bothers some people's digestion) Weak herbal teas	Black and green tea
Other		Hot chocolate Orange Juice Tomato Juice
<b>Miscellaneous</b>		
Soup Base	Yeast –free soup base (although many have curry or turmeric, which is the main ingredient in curry)	Soup base with yeast

# Common Questions

## **Will a low histamine diet help me?**

Currently, there are no reliable tests to determine if a person has histamine intolerance. Systematically trialling a low histamine diet is the only way to know.

Many factors (e.g., seasonal allergies) cause histamine intolerance symptoms. If you experience these symptoms, it does not mean that you have histamine intolerance and must follow a low histamine diet. However, it is worth trying a low histamine diet and continuing with it, only if you experience significant improvement.

Before starting a low histamine diet trial, consider the disadvantages. Dietary changes can be time consuming and stressful.

## **How long should I follow a low histamine diet?**

If you feel better on a low histamine diet, follow it for about four weeks before starting to liberalize your diet.

If you don't feel better, a three-week trial is sufficient. If the diet is going to help, you will know by then.

## **What about food that is not on the guidelines above?**

If the food is not fermented and is fresh (e.g., is not leftovers and is not an overripe fruit or vegetable), you will probably tolerate it.

## **What if I still have symptoms on the low histamine diet?**

Puzzling food allergy symptoms are often related to several, cumulative triggers (diet and non-diet). Changing your diet may reduce, but usually does

not eliminate symptoms. However, this does not mean the low histamine diet is ineffective. The question is: Are your symptoms better on the diet?

## **Should I try other food restrictions at the same time?**

It is best to make only one dietary change at a time. For example, if you start a low histamine and a gluten-free diet at the same time, and you feel better, you won't know which restriction was helpful.

## **What about minute quantities of restricted food?**

Minute quantities are okay. You don't need to worry about cross contamination.

## **Is there a "histamine-free" diet?**

Clients often want a "histamine-free" diet for two reasons. Firstly, some clients feel better on a low histamine diet, but not completely. They would like to further improve symptoms with additional food elimination. However, many non-diet factors contribute to symptoms and symptoms will still occur, no matter what they eat. Secondly, some clients want to follow a "histamine-free diet" because they are scared about severe reactions.

A "histamine-free" diet is not possible because it is an educated guess, based on anecdotal reports. If you restrict every problematic food on the internet, there wouldn't be anything left to eat! Over restriction leads to stress and malnutrition, further compromising health.

# Meal Plan Ideas

I've listed some meal plan ideas to help you follow Wendy's Low Histamine Diet Guidelines. Individual tolerances vary, so you will likely need to make substitutions.

A balanced meal contains protein, whole grain or starchy vegetable, fruit or vegetable and some fat (i.e. the items in each row would provide a balanced meal). An additional source of calcium and vitamin D may be needed. A registered dietitian can work with you to plan a nutritious menu.

Protein	Whole Grain or Starchy Vegetable	Fruit or Vegetable	Fat (if needed, beyond other foods)
<b>Breakfast</b> *Note: soy beverage is the only milk substitute with equivalent protein and fat to milk.			
Milk or hemp seed*	Hot oatmeal (cooked in water),	Blueberries	Provided in milk or hemp seed.
Boiled egg (limit eggs to less than one per day during your restriction trial, after that you can experiment)	Whole grain cracker	Sliced apple	Butter or coconut oil
Peanut or almond butter	Muffin or loaf slice	Sliced bananas on top (choose a very fresh banana)	Provided in the nut butter
Cottage cheese	Brown rice cakes	Mango	Provided in the cottage cheese
Milk or chopped nuts	Cold cereal	Diced fruit	Provided in the milk or nuts
Chopped nuts or seeds	Whole grain pancakes	Fruit syrup (puree fruit such as mango and add a little sweetener, if needed)	Butter or coconut oil
<b>Hot Meals</b>			
Baked chicken browned in oil	Baked potato (bake a few extra to fry the next day)	Steamed green beans and chopped green onions	Provided in the chicken and oil
Hearty soup (freeze in individual portions to reheat on busy days)	Whole grain crackers	Vegetables in the soup	Sauté the vegetables in oil, before simmering.
Kebab: chicken cooked on the grill or baked in the oven.	Brown rice	Bell pepper and zucchini –1-inch chunks *brushed with oil	Provided in the chicken/oil. Add vegetable oil to the rice, if you need extra fat.
Sautéed chicken strips	Whole grain wrap	Sautéed sweet bell peppers-Fruit salsa	From the oil
Bean dip	Whole grain wrap	Grated carrots	Add oil to bean dip
<b>Portable Meals</b> High protein food should be kept cold. If food cannot be refrigerated, use an insulated container with an ice pack.			
Sliced mozzarella cheese	Whole grain crackers	Carrot sticks	Provided in the cheese
Bean dip	Corn chips	Celery sticks	Add vegetable oil to the bean dip
Hemp seeds	Whole grain tortilla	Shredded carrots	Cream cheese
<b>Trail Mix:</b> almonds or other nuts or seeds	Cold cereal or home popped popcorn	Dried fruit (dry your own or purchase non-sulphited). Limit to 1 tablespoon per serving.	Provided in the nuts/seeds
Nut butter	Cold pancake	Thinly sliced apples	Provided in the nuts
<b>Snacks</b>			
Home-made popcorn on the stove in coconut oil			
Cream cheese on whole grain crackers			
Celery stick filled with peanut or almond butter and a few sulfite-free raisins (Ants on a log!)			
Crispy chick peas			