

Gluten- and Casein-Free Diet: A Trial Diet for Autism

Some children with autism spectrum disorder have been reported to improve significantly when casein and gluten are removed from their diets. Casein is found in milk. Gluten is found in wheat, rye, and barley. The number of children who respond well to a casein- and gluten-free diet is small, but many parents and caregivers want to find out whether this type of diet will benefit the child in their care.

The elimination diet is commonly used when trying to figure out whether a particular food affects a certain condition. The participant stops eating all foods that are potential triggers for a time to find out whether the food is the source of the problem.

When on an elimination diet, it is important that any foods removed from the diet be replaced with others of the same nutritional value. This is especially important for children with autism spectrum disorder, since they tend to be rather picky about food and the elimination diet limits their options even more.

The information in this handout will enable you to eliminate foods containing casein and gluten from your child's diet and replace them with others with similar nutritional content.

An initial trial of 1 to 3 months should allow enough time to assess whether the diet improves symptoms.



Food Choices for a Gluten- and Casein-Free Diet

Milk and Dairy Products

Foods Allowed

- ✓ Margarines free from milk solids, such as margarines containing soy (sometimes labeled “dairy-free”) and margarines containing whey but not casein (whey will be listed on the label)
- ✓ Milk-free substitutes

Foods to Avoid

“Milk” will be listed on labels of all food products containing milk in the United States. Avoid any type of milk product containing casein, such as:

- ⊘ Buttermilk
- ⊘ Cheese of all types
- ⊘ Cream
- ⊘ Food products containing casein or milk solids
- ⊘ Ice cream
- ⊘ Milk of all types
- ⊘ Milk solids
- ⊘ Sour cream
- ⊘ Yogurt

Grains

Foods Allowed

- ✓ Amaranth
- ✓ Buckwheat
- ✓ Corn
- ✓ Millet
- ✓ Oats
- ✓ Quinoa
- ✓ Rice (all kinds)
- ✓ Sorghum
- ✓ Tapioca

Foods to Avoid

- ⊘ Barley
- ⊘ Couscous
- ⊘ Durum
- ⊘ Kamut
- ⊘ Rye
- ⊘ Semolina
- ⊘ Spelt
- ⊘ Triticale
- ⊘ Wheat
- ⊘ Wheat berries
- ⊘ Wheat bran
- ⊘ Wheat germ

Flours and Starches

Foods Allowed

- ✓ Any flour made from grains on the “foods allowed” list
- ✓ Arrowroot starch and flour
- ✓ Bean flours
- ✓ Cornstarch
- ✓ Lentil or pea flour
- ✓ Nut meal and flours (all types)
- ✓ Potato starch and flour
- ✓ Sago flour
- ✓ Soy flour
- ✓ Tapioca starch

Foods to Avoid

- ⊘ Any flour or starch made from grains on the “foods to avoid” list
- ⊘ Graham flour
- ⊘ Starch

Breads and Baked Goods

Foods Allowed

- ✓ Baked goods and specialty baking mixes without milk, wheat, barley, rye, or other ingredients on any of the “foods to avoid” lists
- ✓ Gluten-free products without casein or milk solids

Foods to Avoid

- ⊘ Any bread or baked goods with milk, wheat, barley, rye or other ingredients on any of the “foods to avoid” lists

Pasta

Foods Allowed

- ✓ Green bean pasta or vermicelli
- ✓ Mung bean pasta or vermicelli
- ✓ Pasta made from any allowed grain (for example, quinoa pasta or rice noodles)
- ✓ Soybean pasta

Foods to Avoid

- ⊘ Any pasta made from a grain on the “foods to avoid” list
- ⊘ Couscous

Crackers and Snacks

Foods Allowed

- ✓ Oat cakes made from oats and oat flour without wheat or “flour” without identified source
- ✓ Popcorn without artificial flavors and colors
- ✓ Potato chips
- ✓ Rice cakes
- ✓ Rice crackers

Foods to Avoid

- ⊘ Any crackers and snacks made with wheat, spelt, kamut, triticale, semolina, durum, couscous, rye, or barley

Cereals

Foods Allowed

- ✓ Any “allowed” grains, cooked
- ✓ Cornflakes
- ✓ Cream of rice
- ✓ Oat meal
- ✓ Puffed amaranth
- ✓ Puffed millet
- ✓ Puffed rice
- ✓ Rice bran

Foods to Avoid

- ⊘ Any cereals made with grains on the “foods to avoid” list

Vegetables

Foods Allowed

- ✓ Plain vegetables without prepared sauces
- ✓ 100% vegetable juices

Foods to Avoid

- ⊘ Vegetables with prepared sauces, dressings, or toppings containing milk, wheat, barley, rye, or other ingredients on any of the “foods to avoid” lists

Legumes (Beans, Peas, Lentils, Peanuts)

Foods Allowed

- ✓ Dried or canned beans and peas, such as split peas, black-eyed peas, kidney beans, navy beans, pinto beans, and soybeans
- ✓ Lentils (brown, yellow, white)
- ✓ Peanuts
- ✓ Plain peanut butter without sweeteners
- ✓ Plain tofu

Foods to Avoid

- ⊘ Legumes in recipes that contain milk, wheat, barley, rye, or other ingredients on any of the “foods to avoid” lists

Fruit

Foods Allowed

- ✓ Fruits canned in fruit juice or water
- ✓ Plain fresh, frozen, or dried fruits
- ✓ 100% fruit juices, including fresh-squeezed, pasteurized, calcium-fortified, and cans or cartons

Foods to Avoid

- ⊘ Any fruit preparation that contains milk or a milk product such as ice cream, yogurt, or some types of sherbet
- ⊘ Any fruit preparation that includes wheat, barley, or rye; flour made from those grains; or other ingredients on any of the “foods to avoid” list

Meat, Poultry, and Fish

Foods Allowed

- ✓ Fish canned in oil or water
- ✓ Fresh or frozen meat, poultry, or fish (or those marinated in oil, herbs, or lemon)

Foods to Avoid

- ⊘ Meats, poultry, and fish with fillers or coatings containing wheat, such as flour, bread crumbs, or batter

Egg

Foods Allowed

- ✓ Eggs and egg dishes without ingredients on any of the “foods to avoid” lists

Foods to Avoid

- ⊘ Egg dishes that contain milk or milk products, wheat, barley, rye, or other ingredients on any of the “foods to avoid” lists

Nuts and Seeds

Foods Allowed

- ✓ Nut and seed butters, such as almond butter, cashew butter, and sunflower seed butter
- ✓ Plain nuts and seeds
- ✓ Tahini (sesame seed paste)

Foods to Avoid

- ⊘ Any nut or seed mixtures that contain milk, wheat, barley, rye, or other ingredients on any of the “foods to avoid” lists

Fats and Oils

Foods Allowed

- ✓ Casein-free margarines
- ✓ Lard
- ✓ Meat drippings
- ✓ Plain vegetable oils, such as canola, olive, sunflower, safflower, flaxseed, soy, and corn
- ✓ Poultry fat

Foods to Avoid

- ⊘ Any margarine or other spread containing casein or milk
- ⊘ Butter

Sweeteners

Foods Allowed

- ✓ Date syrup
- ✓ Fructose (fruit sugar), levulose
- ✓ Fruit preserves and jams made with allowed fruits and sweeteners
- ✓ Glucose, dextrose
- ✓ Honey (for children over age 1)
- ✓ Pure corn syrup
- ✓ Pure syrups such as maple syrup
- ✓ Sugar

Foods to Avoid

- ⊘ Any with flours on the “foods to avoid” list or milk ingredients

Herbs and Spices

Foods Allowed

- ✓ Plain fresh or dried herbs
- ✓ Plain spices

Foods to Avoid

- ⊘ Any spices or herbs with flour or milk ingredients

Beverages

Foods Allowed

- ✓ Calcium-fortified rice beverages
- ✓ Calcium-fortified soy milk
- ✓ Coconut milk
- ✓ Herbal teas
- ✓ Nut milks
- ✓ 100% fruit and vegetable juices
- ✓ Plain water and mineral water
- ✓ Potato starch-based beverage, such as Vance's DariFree
- ✓ Seed milks
- ✓ Soy beverages
- ✓ Whey powder diluted with water according to package directions

Foods to Avoid

- ⊘ Any containing milk, wheat, barley, rye, or flours on any of the "foods to avoid" lists

Other Allowed Ingredients

- ✓ Baker's yeast
- ✓ Baking powder
- ✓ Baking soda
- ✓ Cream of tartar
- ✓ Guar gum
- ✓ Plain gelatin
- ✓ Salt
- ✓ Xanthan gum