

# THE INFLAMMATORY FOODS THAT FUEL AUTOIMMUNE FLARES

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If you're living with an autoimmune condition—or even just navigating unexplained symptoms like fatigue, joint pain, rashes, or brain fog—you've probably wondered at some point: Could food be playing a role in this?

It's a fair question. And an important one.

Food can be a powerful ally in healing. But for many people with immune system imbalances, certain foods can also act as triggers—not because they're inherently “bad,” but because the body is interpreting them as threats.

Understanding how and why this happens can completely shift your relationship with food—from one of fear and frustration to one of curiosity and empowerment.

Let's take a closer look at the role food plays in autoimmune flares—and how to work with your body instead of against it.



## Food Isn't the Enemy—But It Can Be a Messenger

Here's what I tell my patients: food isn't the enemy. But in the context of a stressed or dysregulated immune system, certain foods can act like fuel on the fire.

This doesn't mean those foods are universally bad. It means that for your body, right now, something in that food is triggering an immune response.

That response might look like fatigue, bloating, joint pain, skin breakouts, brain fog—or an increase in your autoimmune symptoms.

The goal isn't to label foods as good or bad. The goal is to listen to your body's messages, identify the patterns, and respond with compassion and clarity.

## Common Culprits: The Foods That Often Trigger Flares

There's no one-size-fits-all list, but there are a few foods that tend to be more inflammatory for people with autoimmune conditions. Some of the most common include:

- **Gluten:** Can contribute to leaky gut and cross-reactivity in certain autoimmune diseases, especially Hashimoto's and celiac
- **Dairy:** Contains proteins that may mimic self-tissue and can be hard to digest for many
- **Soy:** Often genetically modified and can disrupt hormone balance in some individuals
- **Processed seed oils** (like canola, corn, soybean): High in omega-6 fatty acids, which can drive inflammation when consumed in excess
- **Nightshades** (tomatoes, eggplant, peppers, potatoes): For some, these can aggravate joint pain and inflammation

Does this mean you need to cut all of these out forever? Absolutely not. But if you're experiencing flares or unexplained symptoms, these are a good place to start exploring.

## Food Sensitivity vs. Food Allergy: Know the Difference

This is where it gets nuanced. A food allergy triggers an immediate and often severe immune response—think hives, swelling, or even anaphylaxis. These reactions are typically driven by IgE antibodies and are easy to identify.

A food sensitivity, on the other hand, is slower and more subtle. It's often driven by IgG or non-antibody mediated mechanisms. You might not react until hours—or even days—after eating the food. And the symptoms may be diffuse: fatigue, headaches, skin issues, brain fog, joint stiffness.

Because they're harder to pin down, food sensitivities often go undiagnosed. But they can still drive chronic inflammation and immune dysregulation beneath the surface.

## Why Elimination Diets Are Tools—Not Life Sentences

One of the most helpful ways to identify inflammatory foods is through a targeted elimination diet—temporarily removing certain foods, then reintroducing them one at a time to observe your body's response.

This isn't about punishment or perfection. It's about gathering information. It's a short-term experiment that gives you long-term insight.

And importantly, elimination diets are not meant to be forever. The goal is not restriction—it's discovery. Once you've identified your triggers, you can begin to heal the underlying imbalances and often reintroduce many foods over time.







## Personalization Over Perfection

The most important takeaway? Everyone's immune system is different. What triggers one person may be completely neutral—or even nourishing—for another.

That's why following blanket rules or trendy elimination lists rarely leads to sustainable results. The real magic happens when we tune in to your body, your patterns, and your healing path.

Food can be deeply personal. It's culture, it's memory, it's comfort. And in functional medicine, it's also information. When we approach it with curiosity instead of fear, we gain clarity without sacrificing joy.

## Final Thoughts: Food as Feedback

If you've ever felt like your symptoms are random or out of your control, consider this: your body is always speaking. Food reactions are one way it communicates with you.

You are not overreacting. You are not imagining things. And you are not alone.

When we start listening closely—and use food not as a rigid rulebook but as a gentle feedback system—we move out of confusion and into connection.

You deserve to feel better. And you deserve a plan that works for your body, not just the latest trend.

**To Your Health,  
Hiba Georges, MD**