

# What You Need to Know About Histamine Intolerance

## What is Histamine?

Histamine is a compound involved in your body's immune and inflammatory responses. It also a neurotransmitter (a chemical messenger) and plays an important role in your gut function.

When your immune system is triggered by a potential threat, histamine is released and travels through your bloodstream. This causes your blood vessels to dilate and creates an inflammatory response. Histamine is best known for making you sniffle, sneeze, cough, tear up or itch. You may have taken anti histamine medications to reduce these kinds of symptoms.

Because histamine travels through the bloodstream, it can cause a wide range of responses in any system of your body.



## What is Histamine Intolerance?

Histamine responses are part of your body's natural immune function and are intended to keep you healthy. However, if high levels of histamine are chronically built up in your body, you can experience troublesome symptoms.

Symptoms of histamine intolerance vary from person to person and this can make the condition hard to diagnose.

### COMMON SYMPTOMS OF HISTAMINE INTOLERANCE INCLUDE:

- Neurological: irritability, depression, anxiety, brain fog, vertigo/dizziness
- Dermatological: rash, flushing, hives
- Rheumatological: joint pain
- Cardiac: Racing heart, palpitations, hypertension, arrhythmia
- Gastrointestinal: altered bowel function, abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, abdominal cramps, non-celiac gluten sensitivity, reflux/GERD/heartburn
- Nasal congestion, runny nose, sneezing, difficulty breathing
- Insomnia, fatigue
- Headache, migraines
- Abnormal menstrual cycle
- Tissue swelling

## What Causes Histamine Intolerance?

Histamine intolerance means that your histamine levels are chronically elevated. Generally, we can say that this is caused by:

- Something producing high histamine levels in your body, and/or
- Inability to clear histamine from your body

Let's look at each of these separately:

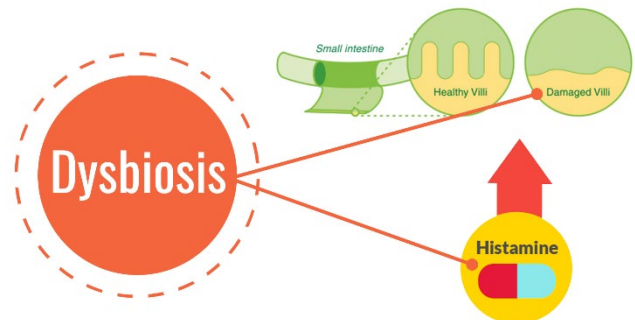
### WHAT CAUSES HIGH HISTAMINE LEVELS?

- Allergies (IgE reactions)
- Bacterial overgrowth (SIBO)
- Dysbiosis (imbalances in bacteria and fungi of the gut)
- Leaky gut
- GI bleeding
- Fermented alcohol like wine, champagne, and beer
- Food allergy
- Genetics
- Histamine-rich foods

### WHAT CAUSES INABILITY TO BREAK DOWN HISTAMINE?

Histamine is broken down by DAO (diamine oxidase), an enzyme normally produced in your intestinal lining. If you're deficient in DAO, you will have trouble clearing histamine from your system.

***As you can see, poor gut health may contribute to both high levels of histamine production as well as the inability to break down histamine.<sup>1</sup>***



## The Low Histamine Diet

A great place to start in lowering your histamine levels is a low histamine diet.

Quite a few foods naturally contain histamine and some foods block the DAO enzyme. The low histamine diet helps you to avoid these types of foods.

Here are guidelines for a low histamine diet:

FOOD GROUPS	SAFE	AVOID
VEGETABLES	Fresh vegetable (except avocados, eggplant, spinach and tomatoes)	Avocados • Eggplant • Spinach • Tomatoes Sauerkraut and other fermented vegetables
FRUITS	Fresh fruits (except citrus, banana, papaya, pineapple and strawberries)	Most citrus fruits • Bananas • Papaya Pineapple • Strawberries Dried fruit: apricots, prunes, dates, figs, raisins
STARCHES	Gluten-free grains such as rice and quinoa	Soured breads • Wheat germ
NUTS	⊗	All nuts and peanuts
DAIRY	⊗	Fermented dairy products like yogurt and kefir Soured dairy products like sour cream, soured milk, buttermilk Aged cheese including goat cheese • Cow's milk
DAIRY ALTERNATIVES	Coconut milk, rice milk, hemp milk, almond milk	Coconut yogurt and other fermented products
PROTEIN	Freshly cooked meat, poultry (frozen or fresh) Freshly caught fish Eggs	Cured meats: bacon, salami, pepperoni, luncheon meats and hot dogs Shellfish • Mackerel, mahi-mahi and tuna Smoked fish • Anchovies • Sardines
FATS	Olive oil • Coconut oil	⊗
TREATS	⊗	Chocolate
SEASONINGS AND OTHER INGREDIENTS	Leafy herbs	Soy sauce • Miso • Vinegar Mayonnaise • Pickles and olives Many artificial preservatives and dyes
DRINKS AND ALCOHOL	Herbal teas	Wine • champagne • Beer Kombucha and other fermented drinks Alcohol in general Energy drinks Black and green tea • Mate

### HERE ARE SOME TIPS FOR FOLLOWING A LOW HISTAMINE DIET:

- Freshness is very important in the foods you eat. Many of the foods to avoid are aged or fermented.
- Most people only require one week on the diet to notice a difference.
- If you are not feeling better after a week, then it is likely that you don't have high histamine levels.
- If you are feeling better after one week, stay on the low histamine diet until your improvements have plateaued. Then, when you're ready, start to slowly reintroduce the foods you were previously avoiding.
- Once your gut health and histamine levels have improved, you will be able to eat some, if not, all these foods. The key to remaining symptom-free is to not eat more histamine than your body can metabolize. If you exceed your body's capacity, your symptoms may reappear. Monitor your symptoms and learn what works for you.

## A LOW HISTAMINE DIET MAY HELP HEAL YOUR GUT

Good news: a low histamine diet has shown the ability to improve DAO levels!<sup>2</sup>

This implies that reductions in histamine levels may contribute to healing your intestinal lining. A healthier intestinal lining secretes more DAO. And increased DAO levels help to lower your histamine further.

## Testing for Histamine Intolerance

There is no definitive test for histamine intolerance. It is possible to test for DAO enzyme levels, but these test results must be considered within the context of clinical symptoms.

In practice, I prefer not to test for DAO levels. A one-week trial of the Low Histamine Diet is good way to determine if symptoms can be reduced by lowering histamine.

## Anti-Histamine Medications

Over the counter anti-histamine medications can help to relieve symptoms. However, most patients do not need to use these once they have improved their diet and gut health.



## SUPPLEMENTS FOR HISTAMINE INTOLERANCE

There are supplements that can help with histamine intolerance, but I encourage you to start with a low histamine diet and improving your gut health. ***This often leads to far greater improvements in symptoms than do histamine lowering supplements.***

Some supplements that can be considered later in the treatment plan are:

- Supplemental DAO enzyme
- Vitamin C
- Vitamin D
- Glutamine
- Peppermint

## Treat the Root Cause of Histamine Intolerance

While a low histamine diet is a great starting point for reducing your symptoms quickly, I want to make sure that you don't overlook the fact that poor gut health is the major contributor to histamine intolerance for most people.

My book, [Healthy Gut, Healthy You](#), lays out a comprehensive self-help plan toward gut healing. If the low histamine diet helps you, I highly encourage you go through the full Healthy Gut, Healthy You plan.