THE INSTITUTE FOR FUNCTIONAL MEDICINE®

VERSION 3

Anti-Candida *Food Plan*

Comprehensive Guide

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Why is the Anti-Candida Food Plan Recommended?

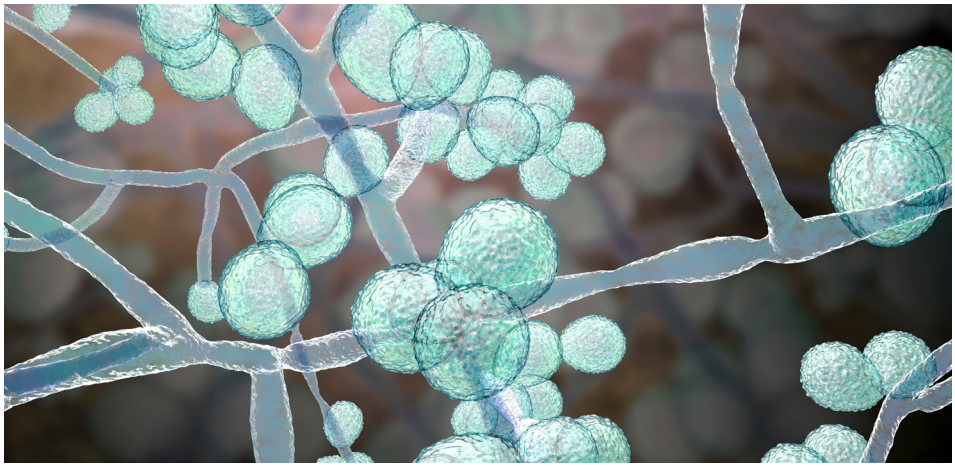
The Anti-Candida Food Plan is outlined in this Comprehensive Guide and has been used as part of an overall treatment plan for the following health conditions:

- Intestinal candida overgrowth
- Recurring yeast infections
- Thrush (yeast in the mouth)

The **Anti-Candida Food Plan** is a type of elimination diet which has been used by functional medicine practitioners for many years to address symptoms of intestinal candida overgrowth or recurring yeast infections of the skin, mouth, or genital area. While the evidence supporting the use of dietary changes for candida is limited, clinical experience and some recent studies have shown positive outcomes when used as part of an overall treatment plan.

Candida is a species of yeast which normally live in balance with bacteria on our skin and in our digestive tract. In some people, yeast can grow in excess, particularly in the digestive tract. This is often called intestinal candida overgrowth, or intestinal candidiasis. Some of the risk factors for candida overgrowth include:

- Antibiotics, particularly broad-spectrum
- HIV positive
- Proton Pump Inhibitors (PPI's)
- Birth control pills or having an IUD
- Steroid medications
- Chemotherapy treatment
- Diabetes
- A diet that is high in sugars
- Smoking
- An immunodeficiency, or weakened immune system



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Why is the Anti-Candida Food Plan Recommended?

Diagnosing candida overgrowth can be a challenge. If a functional medicine practitioner suspects that a person has intestinal candida overgrowth, they may order a stool assessment, which may reveal higher amounts of yeast in the digestive tract. However, this test and others used are not always reliable, so sometimes the diagnosis is made based on symptoms. With the exception of acute yeast infections, the symptoms of candida overgrowth can be non-specific and may include gas, bloating, and diarrhea. Some healthcare practitioners have also observed fatigue, pain or malaise, anxiety or depression, headaches, mood swings, and cravings for sugary foods in individuals with candida overgrowth. Because candida overgrowth is difficult to diagnose and the symptoms are often non-specific, it is very important to work with an experienced functional medicine practitioner to make sure that the Anti-Candida Food Plan is right for you.

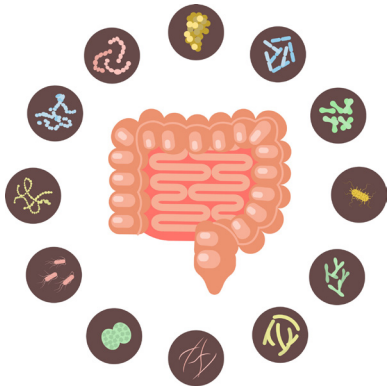
The Anti-Candida Food Plan aims to limit food sources for yeast growth, namely carbohydrates, and specifically, simple sugars. By its very nature, the Anti-Candida food plan is relatively lower in carbohydrates. All sugars, all sweeteners (natural and artificial), refined grains, starchy vegetables, and alcohol, as well as, foods made from these sources are completely removed from the diet for four weeks. If symptoms do not improve, or only modestly improve after four weeks, a more restrictive approach may also include eliminating all grains and grain products, legumes, some non-starchy vegetables, all fruit, and all dairy products for an additional four weeks. Often supplements and/or prescriptive medications may also be included.

Because of the restrictive nature of this food plan, you are strongly advised to work with an experienced functional medicine practitioner who can diagnose and provide additional treatment when following the Anti-Candida Food Plan.



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Key Features of the Anti-Candida Food Plan



Supports Healthy Microbiome: Much of our overall health is determined by the health of the gut. More than 70% of the immune system is clustered around the digestive tract. The gut's immune system is constantly monitoring things that pass through the digestive tract. A collection of microbes (bacteria, yeasts, and viruses) that normally inhabit the digestive system make up what's called the "gut microbiome."

The gut microbiome helps regulate your immune system. When the gut is inflamed, the balance of beneficial versus non-beneficial microbes is often out of balance. Emerging research shows that people who have GI conditions such as Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) have different patterns of bacteria in their gut. Some groups of bacteria have even been associated with higher levels of inflammation in the digestive tract. Inflammation in the gut may contribute to a hyperactive immune response and contribute to gas, bloating, and other symptoms. Eliminating certain foods decreases inflammation, which encourages the immune system to calm down and allows the gut to heal.

Providing essential nutrients for healing is a critical factor in creating a healthy microbiome as well as a healthy immune system. A healthy gut microbiome can be rebuilt by eating healthy whole foods, especially those high in protein, phytonutrients, fiber, and probiotics.

No Calorie Restriction: Since the primary goal of any elimination diet is to improve symptoms, calories are not restricted with the Anti-Candida Food Plan. Some individuals may track nutrients to make sure that they are meeting goals for protein, carbohydrates, fats and certain vitamins or minerals. The goal is to focus on having as many nutrient-dense foods within this food plan as possible. It is strongly advised to eat only the foods which appear on the food list to avoid adverse symptoms.

Promotes Body Awareness to Foods: Most people are very aware when they aren't feeling well, but the connection to diet may not be obvious. The Anti-Candida Food Plan provides an opportunity to cultivate an awareness of how you feel on the food plan and how you feel when reintroducing specific foods. Many people following this food plan report significant reduction in symptoms, increases in energy, and improvements in mood. Keeping track of positive changes can strengthen motivation when sticking to the food plan feels challenging.

Certain foods are reintroduced after a specified period of time under the guidance of a nutritionist or your healthcare practitioner. This helps identify trigger foods that have the potential to cause ongoing symptoms. Symptoms that are currently a problem are likely to improve when following the recommended food plan, although there can be an initial period of worsened symptoms. During the elimination and reintroduction phase, many people develop an increased awareness of foods that trigger symptoms in the body. Overall, people typically notice that they are much more in touch with their body's response to foods after completing the Anti-Candida Food Plan.



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Key Features of the Anti-Candida Food Plan

Identifies Food Triggers: Many people with digestive concerns are aware of at least one food trigger that causes negative symptoms. Recent studies show that individuals with digestive conditions experience significant improvement of symptoms when food triggers are removed.

However, individuals may have more than one food which may be causing problems. The Anti-Candida Food Plan removes common triggers from the diet in order to help reduce inflammation and heal the gut. During the reintroduction process, you will work with your healthcare practitioner to safely reintroduce previously removed foods to identify your specific triggers. In some instances, a practitioner may recommend avoiding a specific food or foods long-term, and therefore, skip the reintroduction of a given food item. This typically occurs when a known allergy is present. Sometimes, a person may react to multiple foods simply due to the constant inflammation and irritation in the digestive tract. Once inflammation is under control, these foods may no longer trigger symptoms.

Reduces Inflammation: Food triggers, specifically in the context of digestive symptoms, can cause inflammation in the gut. The Anti-Candida Food Plan works to reduce inflammation by removing specific foods while providing a plethora of anti-inflammatory foods. Over time, this allows inflammation to subside and promotes gut healing. The intestinal lining is made of cells that replace themselves approximately every two to four days. This means that, in the span of a single week, every cell in the intestinal lining is broken down or sloughed off and a new cell grows to take its place. Removing inflammatory and trigger foods from the diet, while at the same time supplying the body with healthy, anti-inflammatory whole foods, makes the newly-formed gut tissue stronger and healthier.

Reduced Carbohydrates: The Anti-Candida Food Plan aims to reduce food sources which promote candida growth throughout the body. By limiting the total amount and type of carbohydrates consumed, the Anti-Candida Food Plan works synergistically as part of an overall approach to treat and resolve candida overgrowth. Since simple sugars are eliminated on this diet, the focus is on low-glycemic carbohydrates such as leafy vegetables, as well as foods that contain additional nutrients to keep blood sugars balanced, like fiber. Combining low-glycemic carbohydrates with healthy fats and/or protein will also support a more stable blood sugar as part of this food plan.



Low in Simple Sugars: Another feature of the Anti-Candida Food Plan is the reduction or absence of added sugars. Added sugars contribute a significant portion of calories to the American diet (e.g., sugar-sweetened beverages). Refined sugars are prevalent in sodas, fruit drinks, presweetened tea, coffee drinks, energy or sports drinks, and flavored milks. It is essential to refrain from added sweeteners as much as possible when following this food plan. Added sugars can provide fuel to candida in the gut, which can worsen symptoms.

When it comes to satisfying a sweet tooth, one of the best approaches is to stay close to nature by eating fruits lower in sugar, like apples and dark berries. White table sugar and other processed forms of sweeteners should be avoided. Artificial

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Key Features of the Anti-Candida Food Plan

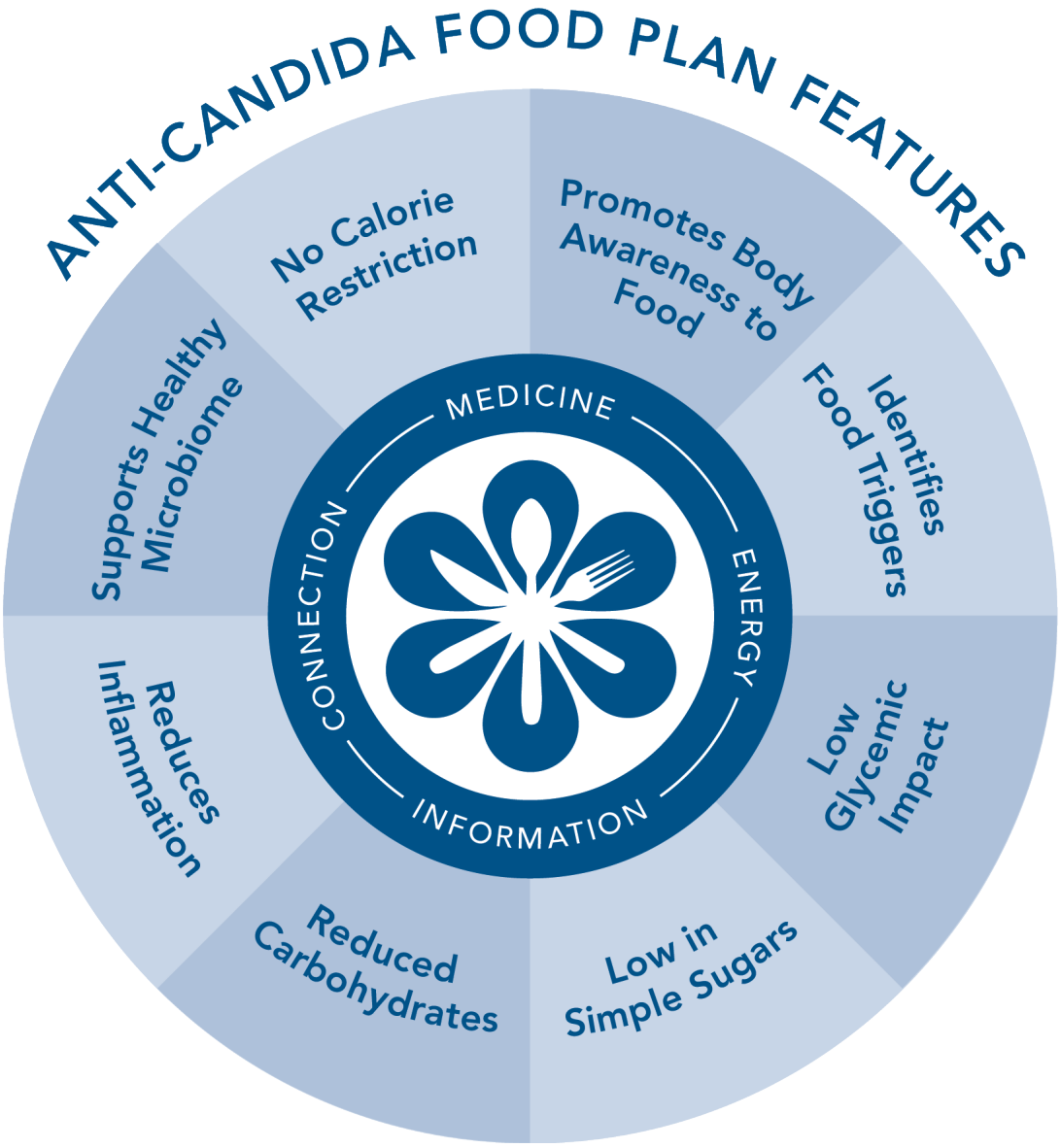
(synthetic) sweeteners should be completely avoided as these high-intensity sweeteners may increase one's tolerance to highly sweet flavors and can have negative effects on metabolism. Artificial sweeteners that should be avoided include aspartame (NutraSweet®), sucralose (Splenda®), acesulfame-K (Ace K, Sweet One, Sunett), and saccharin (Sweet N' Low®).

Low Glycemic Impact: Not all foods have the same impact on blood sugar and insulin. Ideally, blood sugar should remain relatively constant, without huge spikes. Glucose (sugar) has the highest glycemic impact, because it has the strongest effect on blood sugar. The goal of the Anti-Candida Food Plan is to eat low glycemic foods, so that only small fluctuations in blood glucose and insulin levels are produced. Examples of low-glycemic foods include legumes (e.g., soy, kidney beans, lentils, chickpeas), nuts (e.g., almonds, walnuts), seeds (e.g., pumpkin, flax, sesame), most intact grains (e.g., oat, barley, spelt), and most vegetables and fruits (e.g., broccoli, berries). IFM's Glycemic Index and Glycemic Load handout has in depth information on the glycemic impact of specific foods.



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Key Features of the Anti-Candida Food Plan



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Touring Through the Anti-Candida Food Plan



The Anti-Candida food plan is designed to give a snapshot of the foods that you should choose from every day. The Anti-Candida food plan is organized into 11 different categories: Proteins; Legumes; Dairy & Alternatives; Nuts & Seeds; Fats & Oils; Non-Starchy Vegetables; Fruits; Herbs & Spices; Whole Grains; Beverages, Condiments. Each category includes space to record the targeted number of servings per day.

Protein

Protein helps to stabilize blood glucose levels and improves satiety. There are many sources of protein to choose from, even with vegan, vegetarian, or other dietary preferences. Unless there are medical restrictions, protein should provide about one-third of daily calories for most healthy individuals. Athletes, the elderly, and those with chronic health conditions may have higher protein needs which should be determined by a nutritionist or qualified healthcare provider.

As with the other food categories, quality is of utmost importance. High-quality proteins include lean, pasture-raised, grass-fed, organic, and non-genetically modified (GMO) sources. Options include low-mercury fish like halibut, herring, mackerel, salmon, and sardines. Wild-caught, sustainable fish choices are preferred, as some farmed fish may contain higher levels of hormones and harmful chemicals. Other protein options include wild game (buffalo, elk, lamb, venison) and poultry (chicken, Cornish hen, turkey). Vegetarian protein choices include eggs, tofu, tempeh, hard cheeses, edamame, some legumes, and lentils. Select protein powders include hemp, hydrolyzed collagen, whey, and egg.

Legumes

Plant foods in the legumes category are hearty sources of both protein and fiber, and an important food for digestive regularity. This category includes a maximum of three servings of dried beans, lentils, edamame, and black soybeans daily. It is important to consider that all legumes may be eliminated on stricter versions of this food plan.

Dairy & Alternatives

Because of sugar content, cow milk, goat milk, and all flavored yogurts are not included in this food plan. Plain yogurt and kefir may be eaten, as tolerated. Unsweetened milk alternatives such as almond, flax, soy, and hemp milks are permitted. Commercial yogurt and non-organic dairy alternatives often contain added sugars, hormones, and other toxins, so it is very important to purchase organic, non-GMO, and unsweetened yogurt and milk alternatives on this food plan.

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Touring Through the Anti-Candida Food Plan

Nuts & Seeds

Nuts and seeds, both excellent sources of healthy fat and protein, provide a variety of snack options for those following this food plan. Organic, unsweetened, and unsalted nuts and seeds—and butters made from them—are preferred whenever possible. They can be added to meals for a nutrient and flavor boost when sprinkled on top of salads or vegetable dishes, and make a great snack choice. Nut butters like almond butter and tahini can be used as condiments, spread on fruit, or drizzled over vegetables. Flaxseeds and hemp seeds can be ground and stirred into smoothies or sprinkled on salads. Eating at least 1 to 2 servings of nuts daily is recommended. Nuts commonly found to be higher in mold such as cashews and pistachios are not included on this food plan.

Fats & Oils

A large selection of fats and oils can be used for salad dressings and cooking while following the Anti-Candida Food Plan. Approved choices are minimally refined, cold-pressed, organic, non-GMO fats and liquid oils, as these will be the best quality.

Extra-virgin olive oil is a rich source of mono-unsaturated fats and is associated with healthy inflammation and cholesterol levels. Research suggests that consuming minimally processed extra-virgin olive oil provides the greatest health benefits by increasing healthy cholesterol and decreasing damage to blood vessels. The health benefits of olive oil are also found in whole olives, which are included in this category.

Another high-quality fat included in the Anti-Candida Food Plan is avocado oil. Unlike many other plant-based oils that are pressed from the plants' seeds, avocado oil is pressed from the fruit itself. In addition to being good sources of health promoting mono-unsaturated fats, avocados and their oils are nutrient-dense and antioxidant-rich. The "meat" of the avocado is rich in a variety of nutrients as well. One half of an average avocado contains more potassium than a banana, in addition to other important nutrients like magnesium, folate, choline, and glutathione.



While ghee is technically a dairy product, all milk sugars are removed in the process of making it. Ghee is primarily composed of short-chain fatty acids (SCFAs), which are easily digested by the body. The butter used for making ghee should come from grass-fed cows and be certified organic. Other fats included in this category include almond oil, flaxseed oil, hempseed oil, sesame, and walnut oil. Commercially prepared salad dressings and highly processed fats like shortening should be avoided on this food plan and in general. Keep all oils in dark glass containers and dispose if they smell rancid.

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Touring Through the Anti-Candida Food Plan



Vegetables

Colorful vegetables are a major component of all functional medicine food plans as they provide phytonutrients that can prevent or reverse disease. The Anti-Candida Food Plan emphasizes eating plenty of non-starchy vegetables, naturally lower in carbohydrates, which contribute to a steady blood sugar level. Ideally, it is best to get at least 9 servings of phytonutrient rich foods per day. A serving is ½ cup of most vegetables or 1 cup of raw leafy greens.

It is important to eat a "rainbow of colors." In addition to greens, such foods include:

- Red: beets, red peppers, and radishes
- Orange: carrots, orange peppers, yams, sweet potatoes, and winter squash
- Yellow: summer squash and yellow peppers
- Blue/Purple: purple cabbage, eggplant
- White: onions and garlic

To promote good health, it is important to eat a variety of colors each day. While darker-colored plants are generally higher in phytonutrients, even vegetables from the white family, like cauliflower, have health promoting contributions to make. Beets, carrots, and starchy squash may be eliminated on a stricter version of this food plan.

Fruits

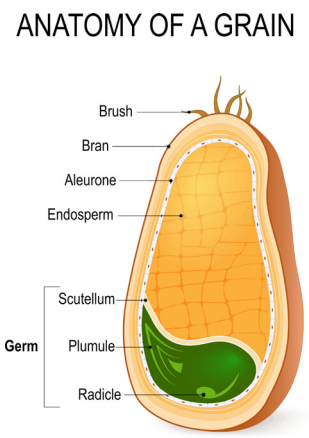
Fruits offer phytonutrients and antioxidants to support gut, and overall health. However, fruits can be higher in sugar, which is limited on the Anti-Candida Food Plan. In general, fruit may be helpful when the desire for something sweet arises. While many fruits are beneficial for a variety of reasons, the only ones which should be included in this plan are those lower in natural sugar: berries, pomegranate seeds, green apples, apricots, grapefruit, and peaches. Fruit can be fresh or frozen, but avoid consuming dried fruit due to the higher sugar content. Pair fruit with a small amount of protein or fat to offset potential blood sugar spikes. Green apples, apricots, grapefruit, huckleberries, peaches, and pomegranate seeds may be eliminated on stricter versions of this food plan.

Herbs & Spices

There is no restriction for the use of herbs and spices in the Anti-Candida Food Plan. Some spices can reduce gastrointestinal inflammation and pain including ginger and peppermint. Turmeric is widely known for its anti-inflammatory and pain-relieving properties. Other spices such as cinnamon, coriander, black pepper, and cayenne pepper contain antioxidant compounds which can help quench inflammation throughout the body. The Anti-Candida Food Plan encourages including a wide variety of spices in the diet.

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Touring Through the Anti-Candida Food Plan



Whole Grains

The body converts carbohydrates from grains into a blood sugar called glucose. Since this food plan aims to limit sugars which support yeast growth, only one serving of whole-grains is recommended daily. For some, grains may trigger symptoms or may be difficult to portion, so removing all grains for the duration of the elimination period may be a supportive strategy. Corn, corn-derived food products, cereals, baked goods, and yeast breads are not included in this food plan. All grain and grain products may be eliminated on stricter versions of this food plan, especially if symptoms associated with candida are not resolving.

Beverages

Hydration helps rid the body of toxins, builds resilience to stress, enhances metabolism, and promotes satiety. It is important to drink plenty of clean, filtered water throughout the day. Unsweetened, no sugar added beverages are recommended to help you meet daily hydration needs. Individual recommendations for fluid intake will depend upon a number of factors, including body weight and activity level.

In addition to filtered water, broth (vegetable, bone), meat stocks, various teas, and other beverages like fresh, raw, cold-pressed vegetable juices are also good liquid choices. Some water intake may be replaced with unsweetened coconut water kefir, which contains minerals and electrolytes. It can be added to smoothies and mixed with decaffeinated green tea or fresh vegetable juice. Sodas, energy drinks, fruit juice, sweetened beverages and alcohol are eliminated on this food plan due to their sugar content or ability to raise blood sugar. In stricter versions of this food plan, coffee and other caffeinated beverages may be removed.

Condiments

Most condiments available on store shelves are not permitted on the Anti-Candida Food Plan, as they contain added sweeteners and preservatives. However, homemade versions of many condiments—including mayonnaise, ketchup, and barbeque sauce—can be easily made with ingredients included in this plan. Store-bought mustards (Dijon, stone-ground, etc.), miso, coconut aminos, fresh lemon and lime juice, without added sugars are included on the food plan.

Ketchup, mayo, relish, soy sauce, tamari, vinegars (minus apple cider), and all brined or sweetened condiments are eliminated on this food plan.

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Preparing for the Anti-Candida Food Plan

Key Takeaways for the Anti-Candida Food Plan:

- This food plan aims to limit foods that support candida growth, mainly refined carbohydrates and sugars.
- Eat nutrient-dense vegetables, high-quality proteins, and high-quality fats daily.
- Use the Anti-Candida Food Plan as your go-to resource and consult your functional medicine provider for personalized guidance.

Dietary and lifestyle changes, especially significant ones, require preparation, support, and lots of self-compassion. When beginning the Anti-Candida Food Plan, it is highly recommended to have frequent check-ins with your functional medicine or functional nutrition provider. Here is a list of things that will support you on this short-term food plan:

- Clean out the refrigerator and pantry
- Talk to family, housemates, and friends to create a support structure
- Carve out time to shop and food prep
- Pick out recipes to try
- Keep a food journal
- Practice stress management techniques
- Look at menus in advance if eating out
- Communicate openly and honestly with your care team



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Frequently Asked Questions

How long do I need to stay on the Anti-Candida Food Plan?

Most people will follow the Anti-Candida Food Plan for four weeks. Some individuals may need to stay on the food plan for an additional four weeks or longer. Many individuals find that they need to limit high sugar foods indefinitely, which is generally recommended for everyone. If symptoms do not improve after completing the supervised Anti-Candida Food Plan, you should return to your doctor for next steps. There may be other health concerns that need to be addressed.

Why is my practitioner recommending the removal of caffeine?

Some versions of the Anti-Candida Food plan may remove caffeine. It is thought that caffeine may raise blood sugar, which in turn, may "feed" candida. It is up to the discretion of the practitioner to determine when and if to remove caffeine. For those who feel like they must have coffee, organic Swiss Water® decaf is a good option. It is advised to refrain from adding sweeteners or dairy milk to your coffee.



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Frequently Asked Questions



Do I have to stay away from gluten?

The short answer is, no. One serving of whole grains daily is permitted, however, on stricter versions of the Anti-Candida Food Plan, all grains may be eliminated. Those who have celiac, or non-celiac gluten sensitivity should avoid all gluten-containing grains. For those who can tolerate gluten, only one serving per day is recommended.

What can I eat for breakfast?

Here are some breakfast ideas:

- Veggie omelet, or egg muffins
- Green smoothie with protein powder and berries
- Greek yogurt and berries
- Breakfast veggie hash

What about drinking alcohol?

Alcohol should be avoided while on the Anti-Candida Food Plan. Many alcoholic beverages like beer and wine are fermented with yeast, and also contain sugar. Once you have completed the food plan, alcohol may be consumed in moderation, and as tolerated. For a generally healthy man, 1 to 2 glasses (5 ounces or 2/3 cup) of red wine, depending on body weight is generally acceptable. Women should be advised to have just 1 glass of wine no more than four times a week due to the recognized association between breast cancer and increased alcohol consumption.

Should I take a probiotic while on the Anti-Candida Food Plan?

Many healthcare practitioners will recommend probiotics with anti-fungal herbs and/or medication while you are on the Anti-Candida Food Plan. Functional medicine practitioners commonly recommend probiotics that contain **Lactobacillus** and **Bifidobacteria** strains for intestinal candida overgrowth. For brand and dosing recommendations specific for you, talk to your functional medicine provider or nutritionist.

What happens if my symptoms return?

Some people may experience a recurrence of candida symptoms after a period of stress, illness, dietary changes, a course of antibiotics, or when taking certain medications. If this is the case, your practitioner may recommend repeating the Anti-Candida Food Plan for four weeks, or for an abbreviated timeframe.

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Frequently Asked Questions

What is a "stricter version" of the Anti-Candida food plan?

On any elimination diet, the goal is to remove trigger foods so the body can heal. Many times, this starts with the removal of the most common trigger foods and expands to include more foods if symptoms do not improve. The term "stricter version" refers to the latter, in which, more foods are removed from the food plan. Don't despair, elimination diets like the Anti-Candida Food Plan are temporary, so if you are following a stricter version, you won't be limited this way forever.

Do I need to take any supplements while on the Anti-Candida Food Plan?

Many healthcare practitioners will recommend probiotics and/or other supplements while you are following the Anti-Candida Food Plan; others won't. Please talk with your functional medicine practitioner about any supplement recommendations to complement your treatment plan.

Do I need to eat "organic"?

It's recommended to eat "organic" as often as possible. Organic fruits, vegetables, meat, and dairy do not allow conventional herbicides, pesticides, hormones, and synthetic additives, or irradiation of meat. Since many of these chemicals can irritate the digestive tract and contribute to inflammation, we recommend eating organic whenever possible. If there are financial or access limitations, we recommend using the Dirty Dozen™ and Clean Fifteen™ lists from the Environmental Working Group as guides.



Can I go out to eat?

Yes, depending on the restaurant. Fast food restaurants are not recommended as the quality and ability to accommodate special requests is limited. "Sit down" restaurants are likely to be a better option. You will want to take a look at the menu ahead of time and identify items that are on your recommended food plan. For instance, plain grilled salmon, or chicken and cooked vegetables are available at many restaurants. For breakfast, most restaurants offer eggs and vegetables, which can be customized into an omelet. Make sure that you avoid scrambled eggs, as dairy and other additives may be added. Most "sit down" restaurants will accommodate if you explain that you are on a special food plan and need to avoid certain foods and additives.

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Resources and Tools for Success

Changing food habits, especially in the setting of digestive symptoms and conditions, can be a complex and difficult process. To help you, we have included food plans, tracking documents, and other information to make this a "do-able" process. Look over this information carefully. If any questions arise, please contact your functional medicine practitioner.

The following handouts are available to help patients and practitioners with the Anti-Candida Food Plan:

- **Anti-Candida Food Plan – Bibliography**
- **Anti-Candida Food Plan**
- **Food Reintroduction Symptoms Tracker**
- **Understanding Trigger Foods**

Acknowledgements

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Disclaimer

The Anti-Candida Food Plan is best followed under the supervision of a qualified nutritionist or healthcare professional who is experienced in this specialized area.

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