

# Autoimmune Protocol/Autoimmune Paleo (AIP) Guide

With Reintroduction Instructions

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## What is the Autoimmune Protocol?

To understand the Autoimmune Protocol, it's important to first understand a little bit about the gut. Your gut is very important to your overall health. A compromised gut (often referred to as "leaky gut") can affect not only digestion, but also inflammation throughout the body — even in your brain. The Autoimmune Protocol, also known as Autoimmune Paleo or "AIP", is a diet and lifestyle regimen used to heal the gut and decrease inflammation throughout the body. AIP typically includes 30-90 days of a dietary elimination phase, followed by a reintroduction phase that allows individuals to understand how their body reacts to certain foods. It is very important to follow the elimination phase closely, and to take food reintroductions slowly.

It's called the "*autoimmune*" protocol because many people who are prescribed this dietary regimen have been diagnosed with an autoimmune condition or are presenting symptoms of autoimmunity. What is commonly overlooked is that AIP is meant to include more than food: it encourages individuals to consider what else may be contributing to inflammation in their lives (e.g. stress, poor sleep, etc.) and to address the root cause.

## Why do I need to eliminate certain "non-AIP" foods?

Foods can make or break our gut. Literally. There are "common culprits" when it comes to which foods "break down" the gut and lead to inflammation in the body, and these are the foods that are removed during the elimination phase of the AIP. They include [processed foods](#), [dairy](#), grains and legumes, nightshades, sugar (refined and artificial), and refined vegetable oils. You can click the linked foods to read more about why that food can contribute to poor gut health. Not all these foods will need to be eliminated permanently. There is a good chance that you'll be able to add several back into your diet once your gut has begun to heal.

## How long does AIP take/When can I begin to reintroduce foods?

The elimination phase of the AIP usually lasts somewhere between **30-90 days** but is highly individual. Factors that play into how long the elimination phase should last include the level of inflammation or severity of symptoms that led you to the AIP, how strictly you have adhered to the elimination phase foods, and whether you've also begun to eliminate lifestyle factors that contribute to inflammation, as well.

## How will I know that I'm ready to reintroduce foods?

A minimum of 30 days of strict elimination is highly encouraged. After the initial 30 days, individuals should do their best to be "in tune" with their body. If your symptoms have begun to improve, you can begin reintroducing foods. However, it is important that you understand how your symptoms look and feel prior to reintroducing foods, as you will need to be able to differentiate between your current "everyday normal" and an inflammation flare. Flares can reveal themselves as many different symptoms (e.g. fatigue, joint pain, headache, skin rashes, etc.), and for this reason, many people wait until they are almost, if not completely, symptom free to reintroduce foods.

## The caveat to the elimination phase

A caveat: A diverse and nutritious diet is important to your long-term gut and overall health, and a restrictive diet is not feasible for extended periods of time. If your symptoms have not subsided after 3-6 months of strict elimination, discuss your healing with Dr. Aaron or Dr. Rob to determine which next steps may be best for you.

**No matter when you begin to reintroduce foods, it's important to follow several guidelines, listed below.**

### Is there a proper way to reintroduce foods?

The goal of reintroductions is to determine which foods your body can tolerate, and which cause an inflammatory response. An inflammatory response is never fun, so introductions should be taken slowly, starting with a small amount in the morning and eating more throughout the day (if the previous amount did not cause a reaction). It's also important to spread out reintroductions so there is no confusion about which food is causing the response. Here is our guide of how to proceed with food reintroductions:

#### **Step 1**

Set your "start date." Choose a day that is fitting for you, keeping in mind the types of symptoms you typically experienced prior to AIP. For example, if you used to experience a lot of digestive distress that impaired you from partaking in social events, try not to schedule reintroductions around a big occasion. The best time to schedule reintroductions is for a "normal" week, to try to minimize any variables in your life, in a best attempt to isolate food as one of the only or few things that are changing.

It is also helpful to understand your daily fluctuation of symptoms and what is "normal" for you. A reaction is considered anything that is outside of that "normal" range.

#### **Step 2**

Create your list of foods in the order you'd like to reintroduce them. Again, you can choose most nutrient-dense first, those you miss first, or a combination of methods.

#### **Step 3**

*Before you begin, note that if you do experience a negative reaction at any point, stop the reintroduction of that food and move it to the bottom of your reintroduction list to try again in several weeks or months.* For each food, on Day 1, start with ½ teaspoon of that food and wait 15 minutes. If no reaction, eat 1 teaspoon and wait 15 minutes. If no reaction, eat 1 ½ teaspoons and wait a few hours. \*\* If you still do not experience a reaction, you can now eat a *normal (serving)* size portion of the food. You are now done for the day!

\*\*This slow approach is recommended for people who have experienced severe symptoms in the past. If your symptoms have never been severe or life-threatening, you can instead try ½ serving of the reintroduced food in the morning, and ½ serving at lunch or with dinner.

#### **Step 4**

Over the next 3 days, do not include the food you reintroduced in step 3. Monitor yourself for symptoms, as reactions can take up to 72 hours to occur.

>If you do experience any increase in symptoms, move this food to the bottom of your reintroduction list (to try again after your gut has healed further), wait for symptoms to subside so that you have a good baseline, and then begin Step 3 again with your next food choice.

> If you do not experience any reaction, move to step 5.

## Step 5

Eat a small amount (½ to 1 serving) of the food every day for a week, monitoring yourself for symptoms. If at any point your symptoms increase, stop the reintroduction process. This step of the process will help determine whether your symptoms are due to an accumulative effect of the food.

If you do not experience any symptoms during this week of steady consumption, then you are able to keep that food in your diet (but again, keep it in moderation), and can begin again with the next food on your list.

A note about mentality during food reintroductions:

Your mind is a powerful thing. You've probably heard of the "placebo effect": when you experience an improvement in symptoms even when the treatment is a placebo. Sometimes, just thinking something makes it so. Adjusting your diet can also be a very emotional, mental experience. Food is usually a big part of our lives. We literally can't live without it. It is natural for food to evoke an emotional response, with reintroductions especially evoking both hope and fear. Hope that you can reintroduce it successfully, and fear that it may cause a reaction. An important part of the reintroduction phase is to manage these emotions, especially fear, to mitigate the effect it has on your body.

Several ways you can manage the stress or fear of reintroductions include:

- Getting support from friends and family
- Prayer and meditation
- Exercise
- Writing/journaling

### Possible Symptoms/Reactions

Possible symptoms could include any increase in your autoimmune symptoms, and/or:

Physical	Mental	Emotional
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Gastrointestinal: upset stomach, impaired digestion (diarrhea, constipation, change in bowel habits, and/or undigested or partially digested food in stool)</li><li>• Heartburn or nausea</li><li>• Aches and pains (muscle, joint, or connective tissue)</li><li>• Skin changes: rash, eczema, acne, dry skin or hair</li><li>• Headaches or dizziness</li><li>• Sneezing, coughing, congestion</li><li>• Fatigue</li><li>• Difficulty falling or staying asleep</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Brain fog or feeling "fuzzy"</li><li>• Reduced mental energy</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Decreased mood/depression</li><li>• Increased anxiety</li><li>• "Shorter fuse"/irritable</li></ul>

If you attempt a food one Day 1 (Step 3) and cannot tell whether you are having a reaction, it will become clearer to you on Day 4 (Step 5).

## Tracking Your Reintroductions and Symptoms

We highly recommend starting to keep a food and symptom journal one week prior to starting food reintroductions. This will help you visually distinguish your “baseline” or normal day-to-day symptoms from symptoms that may be caused with a food reintroduction. You can track your food, lifestyle, and symptoms using a chart like the one [here](#), or you can download an app like [Foody](#) or [MySymptoms](#) to track your diet and symptoms. If you do use an app, we also recommend tracking sleep and daily activity, as that can account for changes in mood, fatigue, mental clarity, etc. Here are ideas of what you should track:

- Sleep (duration and quality)
- Waking mood/sensation (e.g. rested, tired, happy, irritated)
- Pain intensity that day (including type of pain and time of day)
- Mental clarity
- Digestion (we recommend familiarizing yourself with the Bristol Scale, making note of your bowel movement frequency, quantity, and quality) and gastrointestinal symptoms (gas, bloating, etc.)
- Skin quality
- Emotions
- Any other symptoms you have experienced with your autoimmune condition, or that you believe may be related to consuming food
- Other variables, such as stressors, new medications or supplements, etc.
- The attempted food reintroduction

## Where should I start with introductions?

Reintroductions can be approached in several ways, but the most common and encouraged are as follows:

1. Begin with foods to which you’re least likely to react and which are most nutrient-dense, or
2. Begin with the foods you miss most

## Introducing Foods Based on Nutrient Density & Likelihood of Reactions

Dr. Sarah Ballantyne (aka The Paleo Mom) created a 4-Phase chart of food reintroductions taking into consideration how nutritious the food is versus how likely it is to cause a reaction. Phase 1 foods are high in nutrition and low in likelihood to cause any issues. Phase 4 foods, on the other hand, are lower in nutrition and/or more likely to not be well-tolerated.

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
Egg yolks* Fresh legumes (peas, green beans) Fruit-based spices^ Seed-based spices^ Seed oils Nut oils Grass-fed Ghee*	Seeds Nuts* Cocoa Egg Whites* Grass-fed Butter Alcohol (small quantity)	Cashews* Pistachios Coffee Grass-fed Cream Fermented Dairy Eggplant Sweet Bell Peppers Paprika	Grass-fed Whole Milk Grass-fed Cheese Chili Peppers Tomatoes Potatoes Nightshade spices^ White Rice Alcohol in larger quantities Soaked/Sprouted Legumes

			Soaked/Sprouted Grains Any foods that you've reacted to in the past
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*\*if they were not previously approved for you by Dr. Rob or Dr. Aaron*

^Types of spices:

*Fruit-based:* allspice, star anise, caraway, cardamom, juniper, black pepper, white pepper, green peppercorns, pink peppercorns, sumac

*Seed-based:* anise seed, annatto, celery seed, coriander, cumin, fennel, fenugreek, mustard, nutmeg, poppy seed, sesame seed

*Nightshade-based:* cayenne, chili powder, red pepper, curry

### Introducing the Food You Miss Most

It's likely that you'll miss several foods while following the Autoimmune Protocol. Although there are certain foods we don't recommend reintroducing (like sugar), you can mix and match the above stages to better accommodate the foods you are most wanting back in your diet. For example, your reintroduction plan may look more like this:

- Almonds
- Tomatoes
- Egg Yolks
- Seed-based spices
- White rice
- Grass-fed butter
- Etc.

If it is possible, try to space out reintroductions for foods that fall into Stages 3 or 4 of the above method with several from Stage 1 or 2 in between. This way, you can still attempt foods that you might be longing for, while also working to expand your nutritional intake.