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# Lectin Sensitivity: Signs Of A Digestive Response To Dietary Lectins

By [Gundry MD Team](#) | May 25, 2022 | 0 Comments



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Lectins are sugar-binding proteins that can be found in so much of what you eat. Lectins are

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part of a plant's natural defense system against microorganisms, insects, and predators like humans. When lectins agglutinate (or stick together) they can become quite a problem for human health.<sup>1</sup>

In general, [plant lectins](#) are thought to compromise various autoimmune responses and lead to worrisome health issues like swelling, weight gain, and heart health issues.<sup>2</sup> But even if you're not troubled by those concerns, you might still suffer from a lectin sensitivity.

Read here to learn about the different types of lectins and how they can affect your intestinal health.

## WHAT ARE LECTINS? AND HOW CAN THIS PROTEIN BE DETRIMENTAL TO INTESTINAL AND OVERALL HEALTH?

When people focus on changing their diets, they're usually most concerned with weight loss. But, what if what you're eating — even the foods that are deemed healthy — compromise more of your health than just your weight?

That's the case with the most common dietary lectins found in the following foods:

- **Wheat**
- **Rye**
- **Barley**
- **Oats**
- **Corn**
- **Legumes**
- **Red kidney beans**
- **Nightshade vegetables<sup>3</sup>**



And there are many more lectin foods than those listed.

## LECTINS DEFINED



Plant lectins are plant proteins that happen to be one of Mother Nature's best weapons against any predators.

A lectin is a "carbohydrate-binding protein of nonimmune origin that agglutinates cells." These sticky proteins force carbs to clump together and attach to certain cells in your body when you eat them, causing digestive discomfort for many.<sup>4</sup> This is

the plant's way of protecting itself from being eaten by predators (like us).

So, let's say you consume a specific legume, a certain grain, or the rind of a fruit or vegetable. The lectins in those foods search for the sugars in your body they can grab hold of with ease. And once they do, they can interrupt the way your body functions.<sup>5</sup>



Lectin sensitivity is the way your body's immune system (eventually) responds. If you are experiencing lectin sensitivity, you may notice one or a combination of the following:

- Abdominal cramps
- Nausea and vomiting
- Diarrhea<sup>6</sup>

## CAN YOU AVOID LECTINS ON A PLANT-BASED OR GLUTEN-FREE DIET?

The answer is unequivocal: yes. Of course, everyone should avoid lectins because they are damaging to your health. But, you could also be more sensitive to plant lectins than the general population. And if that's the case, you simply shouldn't ingest those plant proteins anymore (no matter what). The consequences can be pretty rough.



So then how do you go about avoiding them? There's one lectin out there that gets a lot more buzz than the others — gluten. So many people have adopted gluten-free lifestyles. But have they actually fixed their problem? Likely not because gluten is just one lectin. Therefore foods that are gluten-free are not necessarily lectin-free. And the gang of other lectins out there can mess your system up in similar ways to gluten for the gluten-allergic.

But there are so many wonderful plant-based foods that are lectin-free. And if you're avoiding gluten and lectins on a plant-based diet, you can still *eat more of these lectin-free foods*:

- In-season berries (in moderation)
- Bitter leafy greens
- Dark Chocolate (72% or higher)
- Celery



- Broccoli
- Pistachios
- Pine nuts
- Pecans
- Coconut
- Cauliflower
- Arugula
- Kale
- Sauerkraut
- Kimchi
- Onions
- Chives
- Scallions
- Raw carrots
- Artichokes
- Raw beets
- Radishes
- Cilantro
- Asparagus
- Garlic
- Romaine
- Kohlrabi
- Spinach
- Endive
- Basil
- Mint
- Algae
- Seaweed
- Mushrooms



That list is just the beginning of what you can eat when sticking to a plant-based lectin-free diet.

## **AVOID THESE LECTIN-RICH FOODS: NIGHTSHADES, BEANS AND GRAINS, AND MORE**

People do seem pretty well-educated these days when it comes to wheat and grains and why you should ignore or avoid most of them – or at least eat them in moderation. But there’s more to lectins than just what’s found in wheat and grains.

For instance, the following foods should be on your avoidance list –

- Peanuts
- Rice
- Beans
- Potatoes



- Soy
- Barley
- Lentils
- Tomatoes
- Eggplant
- Bell pepper
- Jalapeno peppers
- Certain seeds



Now, if you're wondering why potatoes, tomatoes, eggplant, and peppers are on this list, you may not yet be familiar with nightshades. Nightshade vegetables are part of a family of plant foods called Solanaceae.

Tomatoes, peppers, potatoes, and eggplants are just some of the common nightshade vegetables. The toxic compounds in nightshade vegetables are

thought to be anti-nutritional because they affect the digestion and can hinder the absorption of nutrients.<sup>7</sup>

## HOW DOES YOUR DIGESTIVE SYSTEM HANDLE LECTINS?

Human guts face all sorts of challenges. Some believe more people than not have experienced some sort of gut damage in their lives. And while lectins aren't the only reason for gut damage, [they can cause some serious issues](#).

The lining of your intestine contains epithelial cells that help to form a barrier in your small intestine that can separate the host from the environment. This barrier also produces digestive enzymes to help you process food. But when that barrier of epithelial cells is compromised by something like lectin consumption or the loss of white blood cells, it can allow toxins like lectins to enter your bloodstream, and can, therefore, lead to serious digestive issues.<sup>8,9</sup>

The good microorganisms (or gut bugs) in your gut need you and your gut to stay healthy — since you are quite literally their home. And your gut needs those good gut bugs to keep it healthy, too. But when lectins invade, the good bacteria can no longer feed on what they need to maintain your gut health.

Of course, in this case, digestive enzymes like probiotics might help you correct the situation.

## LECTIN SENSITIVITY: WRAPPING IT UP

Is this all cause for worry? Well, not really. You see, you can actually help your gut quite



significantly by cutting out dietary lectins.

And if you're interested in eating lectin-free but are not interested in giving up your animal proteins, you don't have to. You can still eat plenty of animal protein. In fact, you should focus on consuming the following animal proteins in addition to loads of lectin-free veggies –

- Pasture-raised poultry
- Grass-fed beef
- Wild-caught seafood
- Cage-free Omega-3 eggs

And if you suspect you might be sensitive to lectins, take a week and pay attention to what you're eating and how it makes you feel. Then, the next week, try eliminating lectins from your diet completely. Pay attention to how you feel. You may feel the benefits of a lectin-free diet sooner than you anticipate.

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