

Oxalates, A Hidden Source of Inflammation

Oxalates are tiny, sharp, crystalline structures that get into our body through eating certain high oxalate-containing foods and can be an unpleasant side effect from exposure to fungal infectors. There is research linking high oxalates to people who have difficulty metabolizing and burning fat. Oxalates are often overlooked as a source of inflammation in the body, but they contribute to chronic inflammation including joint pain, urinary tract inflammation, kidney stones, and gastrointestinal inflammation. They destroy antioxidant function in our body, which can keep our cells trapped in a vicious cycle of inflammation. Oxalates in overabundance have been implicated in the following health issues:

- Kidney stones
- Cataracts
- Breast Cancer
- Pulmonary Fibrosis
- Fibromyalgia
- Endometriosis
- Uterine Fibroids
- PCOS
- Thyroid dysfunction
- Interstitial Cystitis
- Vulvodynia
- Arthritis
- Osteopenia
- Osteoporosis
- Vertigo
- Diverticulitis
- Sarcoidosis

If you think you may have oxalate issues, have the appropriate testing completed to ensure that you have a start and end-point for oxalate elimination. Eliminating oxalates can take a year or more as they are stored deep in the body and symptoms vary throughout the process. Oxalate levels can be quantified by taking a urinary organic acid test. Genetic tests looking at enzymatic function for breaking down oxalates can be helpful to understand if your high oxalates are environmental or genetic. This is important to know as genetic issues make it difficult to break down and eliminate oxalates.

If oxalates enter the body through foods, which foods do you need to avoid? It is easy to go “down the rabbit hole” in researching oxalate rich foods. There is a lot of conflicting information online about oxalates. In general, it is best to consider all sources and work with a healthcare professional to identify and understand your source. If oxalates are high in your system, it is likely you have a fungal issue, fat metabolism difficulty, or a genetic variant contributing to the elevation. However, if you consume high amounts of high oxalate foods, a gradual elimination can benefit you. Foods highest in oxalates include:

- Spinach
- Swiss Chard
- Beets and Beet Greens
- Rhubarb
- Parsley
- Chocolate

If you eat any one of these foods daily, and have been doing so for more than a month, it is possible you have been super-saturating your cells with these tiny sharp shards. If this is the case, DO NOT STOP cold turkey. When your body sees oxalates, it stores them deep in your body (think joints, kidneys, connective tissue). When you stop exposure, your body will switch from oxalate storage mode to dumping mode. If this happens rapidly, it can make you very sick. If you suspect you've been eating a high oxalate diet, you want to gradually decrease the amount you eat over a period of 2 weeks. If you start getting any of the following worsening symptoms, eat some oxalates to switch from an "oxalate dumping" mode to storage mode and your symptoms will subside. Gradually playing with removal and re-exposure can help get oxalates out of your system over time.

Symptoms of oxalate dumps:

- Joint pain
- Painful Urination
- Excessive Urination/Bed Wetting
- Burning with bowel movements
- "Sandy" poop and cloudy urine
- White or Black flecks in bowel movement
- Skin Rashes
- Brain Fog
- Eye Pain
- Insomnia
- Anxiety/Depression

Aside from dietary elimination, there are many things you can do to speed up the elimination of oxalates. Adding sulfur-based compounds to your diet will help the body detoxify oxalates. This can come from taking a supplemental MSM or making your own bone broth and drinking 1 cup per day. Additionally, citrate will help to bind up excess oxalates and reduce your overall burden more rapidly. Taking a calcium or magnesium citrate with food can scavenge up excess oxalates. Detoxification through the skin can be helpful for reducing oxalates as well. IR saunas, sweating, and Torf-Spa Mud baths work. Also, adding 1 cup of Epsom salts to a bath and soaking for 30 minutes can aid the removal of oxalates from your system.