

Foods for the Gerson Diet

“Let food be your medicine, and medicine be your food”

The two most important aspects of the Gerson approach to healing are freshness and purity. All of the foods ingested on the Gerson Therapy must be fresh, organically or biologically grown, and consumed in their most natural form.

Before we discuss the specifics of allowed and prohibited foods, it is worthwhile to discuss three broad categories of prohibitions on the Gerson diet, and the reasoning behind them.

Almost all of the actions of the Gerson Therapy can be divided into three groups: detoxification, nutritional supplementation, and the cellular/biochemical changes associated with the reversal of tissue damage syndrome. The dietary guidelines that form a critical portion of the Gerson diet are designed to provide critical nutrients in large amounts, and to allow the medications to effect biochemical change at the cellular level.

In order to reverse the tissue damage syndrome, which is a major contributor to all degenerative diseases, we must almost totally restrict dietary sodium, fats, and proteins. Of course, each of these are essential to health; rest assured that one will not suffer deficiencies of any of these critical nutrients if one is correctly following the diet; there is a surprising amount of vegetarian proteins in the allowed foods, and adequate sodium and fat.

It is often tempting to deny the seriousness of one's own condition. Many patients go through a process something like “well, my cancer isn't very advanced, so I don't have to follow the diet closely as someone near death”. Likewise, Gerson patients will often be the recipient of well-meaning advice from friends, relatives, sometimes even from medical practitioners unaware of the complex biochemical interactions that occur in the body as a result of the combined Gerson diet, medications, and detoxification. While it may be true that more must be done for the patient in the late-terminal stages of a disease, it is unwise to arbitrarily modify the diet or practice of the therapy for the sake of convenience or desire.

We strongly recommend that the patient does not add to or change the dietary guidelines without the advice of a certified Gerson Therapy practitioner. While many patients have used appropriate, compatible additions or adjuncts to the diet that have helped their healing process, there are many others who have failed to heal because they made too many “minor modifications” to the Gerson Therapy protocol. The Gerson Therapy has been shown to be successful in achieving remission and cure in many different diseases *when used as directed*; modifications may or may not affect the outcome of your particular condition, but significant alteration without medical advice from someone knowledgeable about the biochemical basis of the Gerson approach may reduce one's chances for recovery.

Now that our philosophy is a little clearer, it is useful to divide foods into three categories: prohibited, desirable and occasionally allowed (but not really desirable).

Desirable Foods

Asparagus	Mangoes
Apples	Melons
Apricots	Oatmeal
Artichoke	Onions
Beets and tops	Oranges*
Broccoli	Parsley and parsley root
Brown sugar	Peaches
Horseradish (grated, not bottled)	Pears
Cabbage, red & leaves (smaller quantities–gas producing)	Pepper, green and red Bell pepper
Carrots	Plums
Cauliflower	Potatoes
Celery Knob or stalks	Radishes (not the leaves)
Chards, all kinds	Raw fruit
Cherries	Rhubarb
Chicory	Rice brown (if allowed)
Chives	Romaine
Corn (ONLY if allowed by physician)	Rye bread (unsalted, non-fat)
Currants	Spices: allspice, anise, bay leaves, coriander, dill, fennel, mace, marjoram, rosemary, sage, saffron, tarragon, thyme, sorrel, summer savory.
Eggplant	Spinach (cooked only)
Endives	Squash
Escarole	Sweet potatoes
Flax oil (organic, not high lignan)	Swiss chard
Fruit dried unsulphured as raisins, peaches, dates, figs, apricots and prunes	Tangerines
Fruits fresh (except all berries and pineapple)	Tomatoes
Garlic	Vegetables (except mushrooms, leaves of: carrots, radishes, spinach and mustard green)
Grapefruit*	Vinegar (wine or cider)
Grapes	Watercress
Green beans	Yams
Honey	Yogurt, non-fat, organic Horizon, Brown Cow, 7 Stars (after the sixth week on the Gerson Therapy or as allowed by the physician)
Juices, freshly pressed, as prescribed	Zucchini
Kale	
Leeks	
Lemons*	
Lettuce	

* Patients with collagen related illnesses must avoid citrus juices and fruits. For all others, citrus juice is optional. Only one citrus juice a day is allowed and may be replaced for a carrot and apple juice.

Occasionally Allowed Foods

- Breads made from whole rye – 1-2 slices a day (if all of the foods are eaten first)
- Sweeteners: maple syrup (grade B) or honey or unrefined blackstrap molasses may be used at 1-2 teaspoons a day maximum.
- Brown or wild rice – once a week
- Yams and sweet potatoes – once a week
- Banana – ½ a week
- Organic popcorn – a holiday treat only

Prohibited Foods

Alcohol	Ice cream
Animal fats	Legume-based food products
Avocados	Manufactured (processed) foods
Baking soda	Margarine or oil based spreads
Berries	Meats
Bicarbonate of soda in food, toothpaste or gargle	Mushrooms
Black tea and other non-herbal teas	Mustard
Bottled	Nut butters and any other source of dietary fats
Butter	Nuts and seeds
Cake	Oils and fats, and any foods that contain them.
Candy	This includes corn oil, olive oil, canola oil, vegetable oil except flaxseed oil, as specifically prescribed
Canned	Pineapples
Cheese	Preserved; refined, salted, smoked, and sulfured foods
Chocolate	Protein powders or supplements, including barley or algae based powders
Cocoa	Proteins and high-protein foods
Coconuts	Salt, table salt, sea salt, celery salt, vegetable salt, Bragg Aminos, tamari, soy sauce, "lite salt" or salt substitutes
Coffee as a regular beverage	Seafood, and other animals
Commercial beverages	Soy and soy products
Cream	Spices, pepper, paprika, basil and oregano
Cream and other dairy fats	Spinach (raw) (allowed cooked only)
Cucumbers	Sprouted alfalfa and other bean or seed sprouts
Epson salts, sodium-based baking powders, and anything with "sodium" in its name	White flour
Fluorine in toothpaste	White sugar
Frozen foods	
Hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated oils'	
Olean, Olestra or other "fat substitutes"	

The following is an explanation for some of the foods on the Prohibited List.

Salt and Sodium

Salt and sodium in all forms, including table salt, sea salt, celery salt, vegetable salt, Bragg Aminos, tamari, soy sauce, “lite salt”, baking soda, Epsom salts, sodium-based baking powders, and *anything* with “sodium” in its name, as well as salt substitutes.

Oils and Fats

Oils and fats, and any foods that contain them. This includes corn oils, olive oils, canola oils, and all other vegetable oils except flax-seed oil as specifically prescribed; butter, cheese, cream and other dairy fats; all animal fats; all margarines or oil-based spreads; coconuts and avocado; all hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated oils; Olean, Olestra or other “fat substitutes”; nut butters; and any other source of dietary fats, except as naturally occurring in allowed foods.

Proteins and High-Protein Foods

Proteins and high-protein foods, such as meats, seafood, and other animal proteins; nuts and seeds; soy or other legume-based food products; all protein powders or supplements, including barley or spirulina and chlorella, unless specifically used when prescribed for protein supplementation.

Outside of these three categories, there are other foods that must be “off-limits” until the patient is completely healed, and in some cases, even after full recovery. Almost all packaged, prepared (“convenience”) foods (frozen, bottled, or boxed) must be forsaken for health reasons. Restaurant food will almost always be unacceptable, both because it is rarely organic, and almost always cooked with added salt, fats, and other additives inappropriate to the Gerson diet.

Patients new to the Gerson Therapy often comment that Gerson’s list of prohibited foods is much longer and more restrictive than other “natural” or “holistic” approaches to healing and wellness. The Gerson approach looks at everything that goes into, or on, the body as important to the healing process. *It is through this attention to detail that we are able to accomplish healing even in some extremely advanced cases, or in diseases that are otherwise not curable.*

We have, whenever possible endeavored to provide a brief explanation why the various foods are not allowed on the diet.

General prohibitions

All manufactured (processed) foods: bottled, canned, frozen, preserved, refined, salted, smoked, and sulfured.

Dairy products

All milk and milk products (including goat's milk), such as cheese, cream, ice cream, ice milk, butter or buttermilk, except as specifically allowed under proteins. Dairy products are generally extremely high in fat; an 8 oz. Serving of 2% milk contains more fat than two strips of bacon! Cheeses can be as much as 65% fat, and are usually very high in sodium. Even "fat free" cheeses usually have undesirable additives, and are high in sodium. Buttermilk is prohibited because the commercial buttermilk now available is "cultured", rather than churned, and is high in fat and sodium. Except plain, organic, non-fat yogurt after 6-8 weeks.

Alcohol

Alcohol is prohibited because it limits the blood's ability to carry oxygen, places additional strain on the liver to detoxify and remove it from the body; and is, in general, toxic.

Pineapples and berries

Max Gerson found that a number of his patients were experiencing allergic reactions, apparently to the aromatic acids present in pineapple and berries. Dr. Gerson felt that the aromatics interfere with healing. For this reason, pineapples and berries are prohibited.

Avocados

Avocados are too high in fats.

Cucumbers

Cucumbers, in combination with the juices, are difficult to digest and are high in sodium.

Spices

Spices (*black pepper, paprika, basil, oregano, and others not specifically permitted*) are prohibited because of their high content of aromatic acids.

Soy Beans and Products

Soy beans and products, including tofu, tempeh, miso, tamari, and other soy sauces, Bragg's Aminos, textured vegetable protein, soy milk, and all other soy-based products. These are prohibited for a variety of different reasons including high fat, sodium and/or protein content, and the presence of toxic inhibitors to nutrient absorption.

Dried beans and legumes

Lentils are introduced if patient is doing well at about 6 months at once every 2 weeks. Soak overnight and sprout for one day before cooking.

Sprouted Alfalfa and Other Bean or Seed Sprouts

Alfalfa sprouts have been found to be high in L-canavanine, an immature amino acid that can cause immune suppression. Patients without a prior history who have used sprouts in juices have reported sudden onset of arthritic-like joint pains and other undesirable side effects. This has only been studied in alfalfa; we do not know if this effect applies to other sprouts, but we recommend caution. Before adding sprouts to your diet, discuss it with an experienced Gerson practitioner.

Oils and Fats

With the exception of fresh raw flax seed oil, no oils or fats of any kind are permitted.

Beef, Pork, Poultry, Eggs, Fish, Seafood, and All other Meat or Animal Flesh Products

These are high in protein, difficult to digest, often high in fat, and make additional work for the liver and excretory systems.

Black Tea and Other Non-Herbal or Caffeine-containing Teas

Black tea and other non-herbal teas are prohibited because they contain caffeine, which is undesirable when introduced by mouth, and because they often contain undesirable aromatic acids (see discussion under Berries above)

Candy, cake, muffins, pastries and other refined sweets

Candy, cakes, muffins, pastries, and other refined sweets are prohibited because they almost always contain one or more prohibited ingredients, such as fats, oils, refined sugars or flours, salt, soda, baking powder, or dairy products.

Note that some breads and pastries can be made using permitted ingredients; these can help to make the diet more interesting, but should not be consumed on a regular basis (i.e., only on special occasions)

Drinking water

Contrary to the commonly heard recommendation to “drink 8 glasses of water a day”, Gerson strongly believed that a Gerson patient should not drink water, so as to avoid diluting the stomach acid, and to allow maximum capacity for nutrition from fresh foods and juices. If the patient is taking less than 13 juices, he/she may need to augment with tea or other fluid.

Mushrooms

Standard white mushrooms are not a vegetable, but a fungus. They are difficult to digest, and provide little nutrition.

Coffee and Coffee Substitutes by Mouth

Coffee and coffee substitutes by mouth, both with and without caffeine. Taken by mouth, coffee effects undesirable stimulation of the digestive system, and the caffeine acts as an undesirable stimulant to the central nervous system. Coffee is also virtually devoid of nutrients. However, when taken rectally, it has an entirely different, and desirable effect on the body.

Nuts and Seeds

Nuts and seeds, including almonds, apricot kernels, sunflower seeds, flax seeds, peanuts, cashews, and all other nuts and seeds, are prohibited because they are high in protein, generally high in fat, often salted, difficult to digest and abundant in enzyme inhibitors.

Commercial Beverages, Juices, Sodas of All Types

Commercial beverages, juices, sodas of all types almost always have refined sugars, carbonation, or other undesirable additives, and are all but devoid of essential nutrients. In addition, consumption of these beverages reduces capacity for desirable fresh, organic foods and juices.

Hot Peppers

Hot peppers (jalapeños, etc) contain the same strong aromatics found in prohibited spices. These may inhibit healing responses and should be avoided. Green, yellow, and sweet red peppers may be used without limitation.

Baking Powder and Baking Soda

Almost all baking powders contain alum (aluminum), which is believed to be toxic. Those that are aluminum-free and also sodium-free may occasionally be used with the consent of your doctor. (*Featherweight* is a potassium-based powder that may be used occasionally.)

Other Prohibited Items

Fluoride in water, toothpaste, gargle, hair dyes, permanents, cosmetic, underarm deodorants, lipstick, lotions.