

SHOULD YOU AVOID NIGHTSHADE FOODS?



We know vegetables are part of a healthy diet, but what about nightshade vegetables? And what the heck are nightshades anyway?

Nightshades are in the Solanaceae family of plants. They include:

White Potatoes

Tomatoes

Peppers – red, yellow, green, jalapeno; also includes paprika & cayenne pepper (but not black pepper or white pepper)

Eggplant

Nicotine

...and the lesser known nightshade, Goji Berries

So what is it about Nightshades that make them potentially problematic?

Plants produce alkaloids primarily designed to help protect them from insects. The active alkaloid in nightshades, is a drug-like alkaloid that may compromise function in the bodies of sensitive individuals. There is no solid research evidence showing an impact on the nervous system or joints, but it there are many people, especially those with joint pain, but also many with digestive complaints as well as nervous system disorders, who feel a lot better when nightshades are eliminated from their diet, as it seems to relieve a variety of conditions.

Some researchers believe that arthritis is often misdiagnosed in people who may in fact only be experiencing the effects of nightshade consumption; in fact, one in three arthritics will react badly to nightshades. Though not yet understood how, nightshade foods may remove calcium from bones and deposit it in soft tissue, setting the stage for arthritis. For this reason, researchers have recommended that all individuals with osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis or other joint problems like gout eliminate nightshade foods from their diet.

My Personal Experience with Nightshades:

As a young child I had psoriasis on one of my knees. If you aren't familiar with psoriasis, it is an autoimmune skin disorder that sort of looks like eczema but generally occurs on the outer elbows and knees (although it can occur anywhere on the body) as opposed to the inner elbows and knees as

typically characterized by eczema. There are many different types of psoriasis, but the common type has clearly defined borders and the skin flakes in round white patches, which causes it to itch – a lot. Sounds delightful, I know. ☐ It is notoriously difficult to treat, but a healthy diet and a well functioning digestive system is of utmost importance; I believe it is for this reason that mine cleared up almost 20 years ago when I began my journey towards living a healthier lifestyle. Unfortunately, about a year ago I was hospitalized for a few days with a severe bacterial infection in my leg (that's what happens when you scratch a cut on your leg with not-so-clean-hands, folks ☐) and was given massive doses of antibiotics; not surprisingly, since antibiotics destroy the balance of gut flora, especially at those high doses, the psoriasis returned.

Since many experts believe that Nightshades should be avoided not only by those with joint pain and problems, but by people with autoimmune disorders in general, I decided to give it a shot and gave up ALL nightshades for 3 months. Want to know what that's like? Well, never mind the fact that I LOVE eggplant and tomatoes/tomato sauce but eating at a restaurant or at a friends house became almost impossible. Restaurants love using Paprika on EVERYTHING – and friends just thought I was more nuts than usual as I picked the peppers and tomatoes out of their salads. I stuck with it, though, because I had to see for myself if this was a contributor to the problem. After the 3 months although there wasn't much of an improvement in my skin condition, I did learn that high amounts of nightshades, tomatoes in particular, did make the itching worse.

So what's the bottom line?

For as many articles as you will find that nightshades are bad for you, there are an equal number of articles you can find that say it's simply not true and there is no scientific evidence to support this theory. Ever the practical realist, here's my simple take on it:

If you have any of the issues above, especially joint pain, arthritis, rheumatoid arthritis or other autoimmune disorder, eliminate nightshades from your diet for 3 months to see if it makes a difference. Less than 3 months just isn't enough to really come to a good conclusion, although if you are sensitive to them you should feel some improvement right away. If it doesn't make any difference at all, enjoy. If it makes somewhat of a difference, than have them in moderation, cooked, for this lowers the alkaloid content by 40-50%. If you have noticeable improvement in your symptoms, then obviously stay away!

Have you tried avoiding Nightshades and did it help you?

Share in the comments below!

UPDATE JULY/2014: I recently had a skin biopsy and, as it turns out, I was mis-diagnosed as a child and never had psoriasis. What I have, in fact, is eczema. While health experts believe that it the same leaky gut that contributes to both psoriasis and eczema, there are other differences pertaining to these conditions and it may explain why avoiding nightshades

did not work for me.
