

Lectins: Toxic Proteins or Revolutionary?

Although lectins are proteins, they are not as good for us as one would think. They are beneficial in plants as they keep insects (kind of like a defense mechanism) away and contain nitrogen which is essential for plant growth. In the human body, however, lectins can be toxic!

Which Foods Contain Lectins?

These are the foods with the most lectins, in descending order:

- legumes (peanuts, cashews, beans, soybeans, peas, chickpeas, lentils) with uncooked red kidney beans the worst. Butters (peanut butter, hummus) from these legumes also contain lectins.
- wheat, corn, rice, oats, and quinoa
- nightshade vegetables (tomatoes, potatoes, eggplant, and peppers)
- dairy products containing casein A1 (most North American cows)
- corn, soybean, and sunflower oils
- squash family (zucchini, melons, cucumbers)
- soy products (milk, beans, sprouts, tofu, oils)
- many fruits, including bananas. See the list below for lectin-free fruit

Why Lectins can be Harmful

The reason lectins cause us so much grief is because they are incredibly sticky and therefore cannot be digested properly. Instead, they adhere to the cells in our guts so that vitamins and minerals do not get absorbed. They also stick to insulin

receptors, blocking the hormone called Leptin, so your brain never recognizes when you are full. I'm sure you can guess where this is going. Yes, lectins increase your appetite. Amongst other things.

Increased appetite means weight gain is at the top of the long list of bad things lectins cause. The rest of the list includes achy joints, indigestion, digestive damage, fatigue, brain fog, constipation, mood swings, immune system suppression, depression, and overall poor health.

Everyone has heard of gluten and how millions are avoiding it whether they need to or not. Gluten is a lectin, but there are many other lectins that cause just as much grief (or more) for people with food sensitivities. In fact, if you have been diagnosed with Celiac disease, you should avoid all lectins.

People like myself that suffer from a wheat (but not gluten) allergy realize that it is a protein in wheat that triggers my reactions. I was never told however that it was a lectin or that I might be lectin intolerant. This probably explains why those without Celiac disease or a gluten allergy (like myself) who have eliminated wheat from their diets feel so much better.

Wheat germ lectin has been shown in research to impact the immune system by increasing inflammation within our bodies. Not just in our stomach or intestines, but all over our bodies. Have you heard of "leaky gut syndrome?" This happens because lectins punch holes in our intestines (hence the leaky gut) letting toxins and bacteria out of your gut to invade and cause inflammatory responses in many other organs.

This resulting long-term inflammation has been linked to many serious medical conditions including cancer, heart disease, diabetes, arthritis, uterine fibroids, breast and ovarian cysts, autoimmune diseases, and small airway obstruction (asthma) in the lungs. I was experiencing most of these health

issues when I was first diagnosed with my wheat allergy. It took me persistence and quite a [long time to figure this out.](#)

The Good News About Lectins

Now for the good news! Lectins are not always bad. Recent research reveals that lectins have been shown to be beneficial in some revolutionary uses. I say revolutionary because the use of natural plant extracts instead of harmful and expensive chemical medication is just that. This is quite exciting, except perhaps for the mega-rich and powerful drug companies. Oops, sorry, I am digressing. Here are some of the revolutionary uses I spoke of:

- Small amounts of lectins may help the good bacteria that live in the human digestive system.
- Research suggests that lectins may be useful for helping to identify and diagnose cancer. Lectins are also being studied for their potential to slow down the rate that cancer cells multiply.
- Researchers are even looking at lectins as potential treatments for illnesses caused by bacteria, fungi, and viruses.

Lectin-Free Foods

What foods are left to eat that are lectin-free you ask? If you don't have any of the above health issues to try to clear up, don't worry about them, lectins obviously don't affect you. If you do feel the pain (literally), eat the lectin-rich foods (above) but ensure they are well-cooked and in moderation, and eat more of these lectin-free foods:

- mushrooms, onions, garlic, celery, and carrots
- broccoli, cauliflower, and asparagus
- leafy greens (spinach, kale, etc)
- sweet potatoes (cooked)

- cherries, apples, blueberries, strawberries, oranges, and lemons
- pasture-raised ([grass-fed](#)) meat and chicken
- sheep, goat, and coconut milk as well as South European (A2) cow's milk
- blanched (no skin) almonds, almond butter
- olives and olive oil

To Consume or not to Consume Lectins

So, do you continue to consume foods containing lectins or eliminate them from your diet? Well, that depends on how badly they affect you. In my case I avoid wheat. Keeping a journal of foods (lectins) you eat and how they affect you can help decide which ones to eliminate from your diet.

The answer for those of you without an obvious reaction is to simply reduce the lectins you eat. It is not necessary to completely eliminate them, and there are ways to reduce the number of lectins you are putting into your body. Sprouting, fermenting, removing the seeds, or cooking the culprits well will severely diminish the lectins' potency. Get your pressure cooker out and dust it off!

Intuitive Eating

The moral of this story is to listen to your body. That simple practice is called [intuitive eating](#). If you suffer from many or any of the health issues listed above, maybe you are lectin intolerant! I wish I had this information ten years ago when I was going through my [personal battle to figure out what was wrong with me](#). My doctor wanted to put me on antidepressants, but I refused, believing it was more complicated than that. I'm sure glad I did. I feel better now pushing 60 than I did throughout most of my 40's and early 50's!

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