

Frequently Asked Questions

Please do not misinterpret my answers to the questions below as medical advice. I am not a doctor, and I am not authorized to advise anyone on how to treat disease. I am a really great starch-free baker and recipe developer and I have made awesome progress in healing my body by eating a starch free diet, and below I share some of my answers to the questions I get asked most often.

How long until you saw results from eating a starch free diet?

For me, my gut felt so much better the first week. I also had a noticeable increase in energy within the first week. Right away I knew I was on the right path for my body, and there were no doubts for me at all. But there were a lot of ups and downs, two steps forward, one step back kinda thing happening over the first few months.

At about 5 months into eating starch-free, I did a juice fast for 14 days, where I drank only fresh pressed juices from fruits, veggies, and greens, and I also drank water (I did not eat any solid foods for 2 weeks) and during that juice fast I experienced full body pain relief like never before. The first couple days of juicing were a bit rocky, and I just kinda laid in bed over the weekend with a headache and zero energy, but after a few days of juicing I could feel major changes in my body and pain levels. That experience confirmed for me that I could heal my body by eating the right foods. Nowadays, anytime I want to knock out a small flare I just replace a couple of meals with fresh juices and smoothies and I am back to feeling better in no time. I have met quite a few people who also experienced awesome results from juicing fresh fruits, veggies, and greens, some even for a shorter time of 3 to 5 days. But I have also talked with people who did not feel better when juice fasting. There are also some folks who swear by water only fasting on kickas.org as a way to knock out a flare and help heal the GI tract. Check out the movie, “Fat, Sick, and Nearly Dead” for juicing inspiration. Disclaimer: Always talk with your doctor or health care provider before doing a juice fast or water fast. And if you try it and it doesn't feel right, don't do it, okay!/? You can also check with the [Low/No Starch Diet Group on Facebook](#) for opinions on how to best knock down a flare or how see how others tackle the low starch diet approach.

I feel like giving the diet a full six months before deciding that it is or isn't working is a good call, as it took a good six months for me to really get my AS symptoms in check. It really does take time to build and nurture an army of good gut bacteria that can override the bad gut bugs and in turn work in harmony with our body. This process of healing naturally cannot be done overnight. That is why I have developed all of these delicious starch free recipes, so that the diet doesn't feel intimidating or like a punishment. It can actually be insanely delicious! And the energy I get from eating pure and simple real foods makes me feel so good!! For those making a drastic change from a diet full of refined grains and sugars, sodas, and fast food I would expect it to take a honest couple of weeks of cravings, sugar withdrawals, and feelings of detox to have to be pushed through before the benefits of this diet can really be felt. But again, if it doesn't feel right, don't do it. Seriously. If you start eating all of these clean and natural foods and you start feeling much worse, it is time to go see a doctor, okay!/?

Can you eat dairy on this diet?

I do not tolerate regular dairy products from cows at all. I have a zero tolerance. The last time I ate a serving of grass fed butter on a piece of my starch free bread (about 10 months ago) I woke up the next day and could not move my head, and was later in tears from the neck and back pain that flared up. I believe I have a true allergy to cow based dairy, as it makes my AS flare, it makes my sinuses congested, and it gives me a terrible stomach ache. I spent most of my life avoiding dairy products, but this past year I have added goat milk cheese, goat milk butter, goat milk kefir, sheep cheese, and sheep yogurt into my diet with awesome results. I now eat goat or sheep based dairy almost every day. I still think it is best to start this diet totally dairy free and wait until you can feel the diet working before adding in dairy. I really do believe dairy can be an inflammatory trigger for many with GI issues and autoimmune conditions.

The kickas.org website states, “Dairy is a common problem and many find the need to eliminate or reduce dairy along with starch. Some avoid dairy products not because of the starch, but because the lactose and casein (milk

protein) often cause problems. They can serve as a secondary food source for the klebsiella bacteria. Some people find they do not make much progress on the no starch diet until they eliminate dairy along with starch.” - Kickas.org

What probiotics do you take? How have you worked on rebuilding your gut?

My favorite probiotics come in the form of fermented foods. I drink “Jun” almost everyday which is a fermented green tea that is made in a similar way as kombucha, except kombucha is made with black tea and cane sugar, whereas Jun is made with honey and green tea. See my article on forestandfauna.com for information on where to purchase a Jun SCOBY and simple recipe for how to make it. I also love, love, love buying the fancy Jun sodas made by Wylie’s Honey Brews here in Oregon. Their root beer, ginger ale, and turmeric flavored fermented Jun sodas are amazing!! I do not drink kombucha as I do not tolerate cane sugar, and I don’t like the way kombucha feels in my tummy, and I much prefer the flavor and good tummy feeling I get from Jun.

I also like to eat sauerkraut made from fermented cabbage and sea salt. I have made my own sauerkraut at home which is super easy (just look up recipes online) and I also buy sauerkraut at the store in the refrigerated section. My favorite brand of raw “living” kraut is made by Farmhouse Cultures and can be found in many health food stores around the US and in stores like Whole Foods. I often add a scoop of sauerkraut to my plate when I am eating meat, as I believe the living enzymes in the kraut help me digest my meat better, as that is just a feeling I get when I eat it.

This book is 100% dairy free, and I was strictly dairy free my first 3 years of eating starch free (and I pretty much avoided dairy in my teens and twenties as I mostly ate a vegan diet as I just did not jive well with dairy). But I have added in sheep milk yogurt and goat milk kefir this year, and these are also cultured fermented foods that also have natural probiotics in them. I feel like they have become great additions to my diet, but at the same time I do not feel like they are required for someone just getting started on a paleo diet. I love making instant goat milk ice cream using frozen fruit and a little goat milk kefir, see my “pina colada recipe” in this book and basically replace the coconut milk with goat milk kefir and add in a little maple syrup for a tasty frozen treat.

As for probiotic capsules I currently take Perscript Assist and Megaspore. I take them a few times per month, and can’t say that I noticed any big changes or improvement in my health since taking them, but I like to believe they are helping. Initially I took them both daily (separately over different periods of time), but didn’t see any big changes then either, so now I just keep them in rotation. My ultimate goal is to heal so I am no longer sensitive to starches and grains, so I add these additional probiotics in hopes they will help me repopulate my GI tract with more of the good bacteria. But ya know, I actually LOVE my current almost “starch-free” paleo diet and if I end up having to eat this way for the rest of my life, I can’t say I would ever even complain about it, as I really do enjoy the diversity of foods I get to eat! It would be nice to not have to be so strict and careful when eating out and traveling, but I am quite content to keep doing what I am doing even if I don’t tolerate any new foods in the future.

I have also explored the use of natural anti-bacterials and anti-fungals like oregano oil, which is super potent stuff. That is another treatment I add in if I feel a flare up of AS symptoms. I drink 5 drops of oregano oil in a little water at bedtime, sometimes a couple days in a row. But I always make sure to repopulate my GI with probiotics the next morning, usually with Megaspore and/or Perscript Assist. Please use CAUTION when taking oregano oil, it is very potent stuff. And I truly believe that if oregano oil is taken too often and in too large of doses, it can do more harm than good, and cause an increase in leaky gut and food sensitivities. It is great at killing the bad guys in the gut, but I believe it can also kill the good ones at the same time. This is an area where I really recommend working with a Functional Medicine Doctor and having a full lab work-up done of your GI health, and having a specific protocol designed for your unique body.

Food Intolerances

It is a fact of life that no two bodies, minds, or guts are the exact same. And the foods that those of us with compromised digestive systems tolerate will vary from person to person. Some people will be sensitive to nuts. Some will not tolerate eggs. Others will be super sensitive to natural sugars found in fruits or honey. And the list of unique food sensitivities goes on and on. And while I do fabulous with nuts, eggs, fruits, and honey, I personally do not tolerate cauliflower, which is a bummer as it makes such great “rice” and faux “potatoes”.

Before I was diagnosed with AS, I followed the SCD elimination diet to treat the colitis which seriously helped me to hone in on which foods my body loved and which ones it cannot tolerate. An elimination diet like the SCD diet can be very helpful in identifying which foods work best for you body. It is quite easy to apply the list of low starch foods I share in this book and use them on the SCD elimination diet protocol. And there are other elimination diets out there too of course, like GAPS and AIP.

I am also extremely intolerant of soybean oil, soybean protein, and soy lecithin. Unfortunately all of those years of being a “good vegan” and drinking soy milk lattes and eating tofu really bit me in the ass later in life. With 90% of the soy in the USA now GMO it’s no wonder my body flips out with an allergic reaction to all things soy now. Soy is in flipping everything these days, well everything processed that is. I believe I developed a sensitivity to it after bombarding my system with so much soy all those years. Soy is not allowed on any healing diet that I know of either, as it is not allowed on Paleo, AIP, SCD, or GAPS. Soy is hiding in most salad dressing and mayonnaises found in restaurants, it is often hiding in “vegetable oil”, and soy lecithin is use as a binder in most commercial chocolate bars. So I take my own salad dressings with me when I eat out, (unless I can confirm with the restaurant their dressing is house-made and soy-free), I make my own mayo, and I make my own chocolate bars, and of course all of these recipes are even in this cookbook.

Ideally I believe that as we heal our GI tracts and restore balance to our GI microbiome we can eventually tolerate more foods. I have experienced this kind of healing first hand, as my gut used to be a mess! I used to suffer from the WORST IBS and colitis. Eight years ago I got to a point where I was afraid to eat as I endured so much bloating, cramping, pain, and digestive issues from everything I ate, and I was miserable and starting to fear for the rest of my life. I was seriously in dire straights back then. And I am happy to say that for the last few years of eating starch free paleo I have had ZERO symptoms of IBS, bloating, cramping, colitis, or digestive stress. My gut issues in that sense have totally healed tenfold!! This paleo low starch diet has given me the gift of the healthiest happiest tummy and GI tract that I used to only dream of.

Can I eat sugar?

The sweeteners I tolerate really well are: raw honey, maple sugar, maple syrup, fruit juice.

The sweeteners I use occasionally are: molasses, stevia, wild palm syrup, erythritol, lakanto. I have recently cut back on using coconut sugar as I have a hunch I am sensitive to the high inulin content in it.

The sugars I completely avoid are: cane sugar, table sugar, beet sugar, corn syrup, high fructose corn syrup, agave. I also avoid xylitol because it is so deadly to dogs, and I don’t the risk of having in our house with our 3 beautiful dogs.

I highly recommend quitting all refined cane sugars, and table sugars, at least for the first few months on a low starch paleo diet, as these sweeteners aren’t allowed on any gut healing diets that I am aware of either. And while I encourage the use of honey and maple syrup in my recipes, not everyone tolerates those sweeteners either. So I have also added notes for a lot of my recipes where stevia or erythritol can be used for those who don’t tolerate natural sugars. And anywhere I note erythritol or a granulated sweetener can be used as an option xylitol should work well in that case also.

Low Carb vs. Low Starch

All Starches are Carbohydrates. But All Carbohydrates are NOT Starches. Does that make sense? You can eat a low starch diet and still eat carbohydrates that are starch free. Or you can eat a Low Carb diet which will also be low in starches by default. I personally do fabulous on a low starch diet that includes natural carbohydrates like: honey, maple syrup, dates, figs, grapes, raisins, apple juice, golden beets, berries, etc. Last winter I decided to try a Low Carb Diet where I ate between 20 to 40 grams of carbohydrates per day and got my body into ketosis. I had taken up working a contract accounting desk job and noticed I had put on a few pounds, which I blame on the endless cups of hibiscus tea and honey I drank at my desk, so I went on the low carb diet experiment to see if I could lose the extra pounds quickly, and I was also curious to see how my body felt eating low carb or “keto”. But for those few months of keto I started to suffer from quite a few side effects that I had never experienced before. I developed very dry skin on my face, especially around my eyes. I also had two outbreaks of hives for the first time in my life, and the symptoms of my hives matched the infamous “keto rash” many report getting on a low carb diet. My sleep started to really suffer, I was no longer experiencing the deep sleep I usually get, and instead felt like my body was unable to get to a deep resting state. I also developed really bad constipation while restricting my carbs. And I always felt thirsty, like my body just felt dehydrated no matter how much water I drank, it didn’t seem to help. Through the experiment I learned that my body likes carbs and I do better with 50 to 150 grams of carbs per day, though I don’t really track my diet in terms of how many carbs I eat a day, instead I focus on getting a wide variety of fruits, veggies, green, fresh herbs, nuts, seeds, fish, meats, good oils and fats into my diet. Through my keto experiment I learned what works for my body, but you may find your body to react totally differently. I have met folks who say they feel their best on a low carb diet, but I know now I am not one of them.

Food Phobias

The last thing I want to see happen to anyone who tries eating a starch free paleo diet, is for them to get super stressed out about it. **I eat this way to feel BETTER, not to stress myself out and feel worse.** I repeat, I eat this way because it makes me feel good, it seriously does!! Over the years, I have seen a few folks in the low starch diet forums get uber obsessive about every minuscule trace amount of starch, oxalate, and food high in histamines, to where they honestly developed an eating disorder and ended up feeling worse from this diet, rather than better. I have read the testimonies of a few folks who came forward and had to quit the diet for this reason, as they could not handle the stress of eating this way. Now that is not the norm, but it has happened to a few people. I honestly find this diet freeing as it empowers me to be able to live my life and be active without the intense pain and complications from IBD and AS. This diet is giving me a chance to feel pain free without having to take drugs that come with scary side effects. I have accepted that I have this dreadful disease called ankylosing spondylitis that has already done a lot of damage to my spine and joints. I feel so blessed that I have been able to overcome the symptoms of this disease through changing the foods I eat. It really is a miracle for me. But at the same time if I get a flare up, I don’t let myself stress out about it, as getting flares comes with the territory that is AS. I just look at a flare as a chance to slow down a bit, drink more green juices, read a good book, and day dream about new low starch recipes to try when I am feeling better. I find my biggest non-food trigger for flare ups of AS is hormonal and based around my monthly cycle. I find that stress, both psychological and physical, can also trigger an AS flare for me. I have also noticed that the longer I am on this diet the less intense these flare ups are.

If I were just diagnosed with ankylosing spondylitis or suffering from IBD, I would honestly try a very low starch paleo approach for the first 30 days, eating foods I have outlined in green on the next few pages. I would track how I felt daily in a journal, and write down what I ate each day. If I didn’t feel a huge increase in good energy, and a decrease in pain, I would then invest in a bottle of iodine and start digging deeper trying to eliminate all sources of starch. I have seen many folks get great results without needing to be crazy strict in testing everything with iodine, but I have also seen folks not get better until they did get uber strict. As I have been on this diet for the long haul I find I tolerate slightly starchy fruits and veggies quite often, like apples, cranberries, mangoes, pumpkin, pumpkin seeds, etc, and if I notice any increased stiffness or back pain I just

pull back and retreat to a more starch free diet for a few days. I truly believe the more diverse my diet is the better, as that allows me to offer my body a wider range of minerals, vitamins, and nutrients, while I am increasing my ability to feed a wider and more diverse microbiome of bacteria in my gut.

When attempting to heal from the inside out, it is so incredibly important to listen to your own body. Try your best to drown out a lot of the noise you hear in the diet forums where everyone has an opinion about every single food, and above all else, listen to your own body, and the signals it gives you when you eat these different foods. Your body is the most important voice you can listen to when fine tuning a diet that works for you. The answers will truly come from within!!

What treatments do you use in addition to diet?

I stay as active as I can. I stretch and move my body daily. Every month I go and get “Rolfed”. Rolfing is a powerful deep tissue and fascia manipulation therapy. I see an awesome practitioner here in Oregon, here is [her website](#). She has helped me so much with my posture, even though most of my spine is already fused, she has been able to help release the built up tension and tight muscles in my legs, core, shoulders, and neck. I call it the best form of “torture” as the deep tissue work hurts so good! I always float out of her studio feeling pain free after each treatment. I have to assume that if I still had out of control inflammation in my body it could possibly trigger a flare up, but it is now a wonderful part of my maintenance therapy in keeping movement in my body, and I find it especially helpful in restoring movement and blood flow to the muscles and fascia in areas of my body where I have already fused. I wish I discovered Rolfing 15 years ago, as I really believe I could have saved my posture if I got started with the practice earlier in life!

I have also had great results with warm water pool physical therapy. There is an indoor 92°F therapy pool I go to weekly for a pain free workout. There is also this awesome huge warm 86°F pool with a current of water you can walk laps in. I tell ya, I love exercising in the water, it’s incredible how I can feel pain free and weightless during a work out. And I finish each work out with a soak in the hot tub. Bliss. I am also a hot springs junky, and every vacation my husband and I take now is centered around soaking in natural hot springs. This summer we toured hot springs in BC and Alberta, last winter we toured hot springs around Idaho, I have also been to a lot of beautiful hot springs in Montana, and I have been to just about every hot springs in Oregon, including Ritter Hot Springs, my favorite natural hot springs in the middle of an old ghost town, pictured.



I love grounding myself to the earth everyday and recharging my body’s natural “batteries”. Each afternoon I walk our dogs out to our little apple orchard, take my shoes off, have my bare feet make contact with the ground, while exposing as much skin as I can to the sun, and I soak in the sun rays while reconnecting myself to the earth. You can read more about the science and healing philosophy behind “earthing and grounding” online.

I keep this [theracane tool](#) by my bed and use it to massage my upper back in the evenings. I love how this tool makes it so easy to apply deep pressure to areas that feel tight.

I apply [Tiger Balm](#) on sore muscles. I also like these [701 medicated plaster patches](#) that an acupuncturist first hooked me up with. They are really stinky, but man do they help numb an area. Of all the natural therapies I have tried like acupuncture, massage, cold laser, radon mine therapy, chiropractic (before I was diagnosed with AS and fused), and ultrasound, I find Rolfing to be the most effective for my body. Just like diet I know that healing therapies will vary greatly for each person too!