

# Low FODMAP Foods: Clearing Up Confusion

Have you been given the low FODMAP diet plan only to discover discrepancies between various food lists found online? Or you may have found that you do just fine eating a high FODMAP food but then experience symptoms when eating a low FODMAP food? This is a common frustration for many people and requires further explanation as to why this is the case.

## **WHY ARE THERE DISCREPANCIES BETWEEN DIFFERENT FOOD LISTS?**

The biggest reason there are discrepancies between FODMAP lists online is that the level of FODMAP in any given food will differ depending on several factors. These factors include:

- Ripeness and storage
- Specific plant variety
- Climate/temperature
- Soil conditions
- Level of processing
- Cooking methods
- Which part of the plant was tested (roots, leaves, bulbs, etc)

Another reason for discrepancies between FODMAP food lists is that the research done in labs is still ongoing. Our knowledge of FODMAP variability is always growing and new findings are continually being published. What is found online will vary depending on what research was used to create that food list.

## **HOW FODMAPS DIFFER IN THE SAME FOODS:**

Let's explore some reasons behind this along with some examples.

**Ripeness and storage:** are other factors and bananas are a perfect example. The longer that bananas sit in cold storage to ripen, the higher their FODMAP content (specifically fructans, a type of oligosaccharide). Choosing unripe (or green-ish color) bananas will lower the FODMAPs.

**Specific plant variety:** changes the FODMAP content. Cabbage is one example. Red cabbage contains less FODMAP than white or green cabbages.

**Level of processing:** Soy milk made from soy protein has lower FODMAP's than soy milk made from fresh soy beans. This is because fresh soy beans have higher galacto-oligosaccharides (or GOS for short) than do soy protein. By the way, GOS belongs to the oligosaccharide family, which is the "O" in FODMAP.

**Dehydration:** of fruit involves removing their water content. This process condenses the sugars that are naturally present in the fruit. Sugars are another name for carbohydrates, and carbohydrates make up FODMAP foods. This is why dried fruit should be avoided, but not always the fresh versions.

**Cooking methods:** also affect FODMAP content. Boiling, straining, and canning allows the FODMAPs to leach into the surrounding water, thus lowering the content. These processes only lower the oligosaccharide content (the "O") of FODMAPs because they are water soluble.

## **I'M FOLLOWING THE DIET, SO WHY DO I HAVE SYMPTOMS?**

Okay, so how does all of this explain why you have symptoms for some low FODMAP foods? Or when you don't have symptoms for high FODMAP foods? There are many reasons for this:

- You may unknowingly eat a high FODMAP food if that food was processed, cooked, or grown in ways that increase FODMAPs
- Not following the listed serving sizes of foods will increase FODMAP content. Eating a small amount of grapes, for example, will yield a small amount of oligosaccharide (the "O"). Eating a large amount, however, will increase oligosaccharide content. Before you know it, you've eaten a high FODMAP serving

- Some foods listed as “to avoid” will not apply to all people. Honey, for example, contains fructose, which is a monosaccharide (the “M” in FODMAP). People who have fructose malabsorption would have issues with honey. However, many people who *are* sensitive to FODMAP’s *are not* sensitive to fructose. There are tests to determine if you have fructose malabsorption. Another way to find out is if you follow the FODMAP diet but then test a small amount of honey to see how you do.
- Another avoided food (on some lists) is potatoes. Again, this may not apply to you. Potatoes are, in fact, low FODMAP. However, they are high in resistant starch. Resistant starches act similarly to FODMAPs once they reach your gut. This is why potatoes are to be avoided on some lists. For some people, resistant starches may cause symptoms. For others, they don’t.
- A low FODMAP diet, more than any other diet, is *extremely* There are no hard and fast rules to follow (as much as we wish there were). The way in which your body breaks down FODMAPs will sometimes differ from how other people break them down. Some will experience symptoms while others won’t. Furthermore, some might handle small amounts of high FODMAPs just fine while others will have symptoms on small amounts. This has to do with what caused SIBO in the first place and whether you are methane dominant, hydrogen dominant, or a mixture of both. Do you have insufficient pancreatic enzymes? Or are you immunodeficient? Perhaps you have low stomach acid from taking a lot of antacids over time? Or maybe you have a motility disorder, Celiac disease, or an *H. pylori* infection? All of these factors affect the way you handle FODMAP foods.

## **OTHER DIETS THAT WORK:**

Depending on your symptoms, lab tests, and underlying cause, you may be better suited for a different type of diet. Many people with SIBO/IBS symptoms who don’t respond to a low FODMAP diet can thrive by following:

- The Paleo reset plan
- A low sulfur diet
- The Specific Carb Diet (SCD)
- A strict gluten-free diet only

By now you can see why there are so many mixed messages when it comes to the low FODMAP diet. FODMAPs vary based on food processing, cooking, and growing conditions. Research is always being done and knowledge is improved upon. Serving sizes are critical and can make a low FODMAP food into a high FODMAP serving. Lastly, this diet is individualized and people will respond differently depending on the underlying cause of symptoms. All of these reasons point to why it is important to seek guidance and instruction from our staff at Healthy Connections. It is tough to do this alone. We can help you make sense of it all and hone in on your unique diet needs.