

Glimpse into beginning the Autoimmune Protocol

I have learnt so much in the past couple of years, which is an opportunity I would have missed had I not become unwell. Having chronic illnesses which have caused me to stop work, and for my entire social, personal and active life to change to learn these lessons is far from ideal, but I am grateful (otherwise, what is the point of this struggle?!).

I am constantly reading (when the brain fog allows it, that is!) about my conditions and ways to improve my health. My background as a nurse has helped me here, and a passion for nutrition and wellness has been awakened.

Lately, I have been researching the Autoimmune Protocol (or the Paleo Approach). This is a diet which restricts certain foods so as to decrease inflammation in the gut, soothing and healing it, and subsequently, potentially, improving (or preventing) the autoimmune conditions that are often a result of the gut inflammation. When I was first diagnosed with autoimmune disease, I read about foods which were good and bad for thyroid conditions, and basically put it into the too hard basket (aside from avoiding gluten). I was already eating a restricted diet due to food intolerances, and I was quite unwell, so the idea of making it more strict seemed ludicrous! However, there appears to have been a lot more written about the diet since then and there are so many resources that demonstrate it is a feasible and beneficial diet (I purchased "The Autoimmune Paleo Cookbook" and "The Paleo Approach; Reverse Autoimmune Disease and Heal Your Body" – both of which have been extremely useful). Also, last month I had my antibody levels tested (these show that I have Hashimoto's Thyroiditis), and they have increased from 2400 last year, to 3800! They are meant to be under 60. This has really motivated me to find something that may improve this, and as my doctors says I do not require thyroid medication,

food seems to be a smart place to focus.

When I first read that the body can become confused with even a mouthful of gluten and trigger an autoimmune response (regarding Hashimoto's Thyroiditis), I became adamant to not eat gluten (which was quite easy, as I limited wheat anyway due to food intolerances). The more I read now, the more I learn that it is not just gluten which can cause negative reactions.

On August 15th, I commenced the Autoimmune Protocol and am currently avoiding:

- grains
- beans & legumes
- nuts
- seeds
- nightshades
- sugar and sweeteners
- additives, chemicals, NSAIDs, thickeners, alcohol, emulsifiers
- eggs (which I was already avoiding due to intolerances)
- dairy (which I was already avoiding due to intolerances)
- FODMAPs (because of Fructose Malabsorption, not because of the Autoimmune diet)

The plan is to do this diet for at least six weeks. I will then assess how much it has helped, and whether I should start reintroducing some foods to see if any do not cause symptoms.

I find that I am very good at keeping to a plan if I know why I need to and can see the potential and actual benefits. For example, if I was trying to avoid cupcakes because they will make me fat, I would avoid a few, and then inevitably tell myself that I am far from fat anyway, and I would eat a cupcake, or three. However, if I am trying to avoid cupcakes because the gluten may trigger an autoimmune response, along with the sugar and dairy, and that basically every ingredient in it will cause a food intolerance reaction, then I will stay

well clear of the cupcake, and happily devise a cupcake recipe with ingredients which are good for me! This diet seems very limited, however now that I have read so many people's positive experiences and advice, I feel very determined to keep to it (which of course is only made doable by the awesome help of my family, as I am not well enough to do the prep for this diet alone). I will try to regularly post my progress and recipes. I would love to hear about your experiences with this diet too, or if you are contemplating starting it.

