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Natural Food Compound Risks

Understanding Plant Defense Mechanisms and Individual Genetic Vulnerabilities

Dr. James (Toby) Vandenberg M.D.

Chief Medical Officer & Co-Founder, YouHeal

Board Certified:

Functional Medicine, Anti-Aging, Emergency Medicine

Natural Food Compound Risks: Understanding Plant Defense Mechanisms and Individual Genetic Vulnerabilities

Introduction

Many plant-based foods contain naturally occurring compounds that can pose risks to certain individuals due to genetic predispositions, gut health, or detoxification challenges. While these compounds are often celebrated for their health benefits, they can become problematic for genetically vulnerable individuals.

This comprehensive guide outlines key food compounds, their sources, health impacts, and strategies to mitigate their risks.

Why Do These Compounds Exist? Nature's Defense System

Plants are immobile organisms that cannot run away from predators. Over millions of years of evolution, plants have developed sophisticated chemical defense systems to protect themselves from being consumed by animals, insects, and pathogens.

These naturally occurring compounds serve as:

- **Deterrents against herbivores** - Making the plant taste bitter or cause digestive distress
- **Toxins to prevent overconsumption** - Ensuring the plant's survival by limiting how much animals can safely eat
- **Antimicrobial agents** - Protecting against bacterial and fungal infections
- **Preservatives** - Helping seeds and plant parts survive until optimal growing conditions

For individuals with robust genetics and optimal detoxification pathways, these compounds often provide beneficial antioxidant and protective effects.

However, for those with genetic variants affecting detoxification, methylation, or inflammatory responses, these same protective plant compounds can become toxic burdens that trigger chronic health issues.

This is why the same "healthy" food can heal one person while making another severely ill.

Understanding your genetic blueprint is crucial for determining which foods support your health versus which ones may be working against your body's unique biochemistry.

Complete Food Compound Risk Guide

1. Oxalates

Found in: Spinach, almonds, beets, sweet potatoes, rhubarb, Swiss chard, chocolate, black tea

Risks: Contribute to kidney stones, joint pain, and mineral depletion by binding calcium and magnesium. Can exacerbate gut dysbiosis and Candida overgrowth.

Who's at Risk: Individuals with kidney issues, gut dysbiosis, chronic pain, or genetic variants affecting detoxification

Mitigation Strategies: Boiling high-oxalate vegetables, soaking nuts and seeds, pairing with calcium-rich foods to bind oxalates in the gut

2. Tannins

Found in: Black tea, green tea, coffee, red wine, grapes, pomegranates, walnuts

Risks: Inhibit iron absorption, interfere with protein digestion, and may irritate sensitive digestive systems

Who's at Risk: Individuals with anemia, gut inflammation, histamine intolerance, or genetic variants affecting iron metabolism

Mitigation Strategies: Consuming tannin-rich beverages between meals rather than with food, pairing iron-rich foods with vitamin C

3. Phytates (Phytic Acid)

Found in: Whole grains, legumes, nuts, seeds

Risks: Binds essential minerals like zinc, iron, calcium, and magnesium, reducing their bioavailability and potentially causing deficiencies

Who's at Risk: Those with existing mineral deficiencies, gut permeability issues, or genetic variants affecting vitamin D metabolism

Mitigation Strategies: Soaking grains and legumes for 12-24 hours, sprouting, fermentation, proper cooking methods

4. Lectins

Found in: Beans, lentils, wheat, peanuts, tomatoes, potatoes, eggplant, peppers

Risks: Can increase gut permeability (leaky gut), trigger inflammation, and cause nutrient malabsorption

Who's at Risk: Individuals with autoimmune diseases, IBS, Crohn's disease, gut inflammation, or genetic variants predisposing to gluten sensitivity

Mitigation Strategies: Thorough cooking, soaking and sprouting legumes, pressure cooking, avoiding raw or undercooked lectin-rich foods

5. Salicylates

Found in: Berries, apples, grapes, almonds, honey, cinnamon, turmeric, aspirin

Risks: Can trigger allergic reactions, headaches, asthma symptoms, skin issues, and behavioral problems in sensitive individuals

Who's at Risk: Those with salicylate sensitivity, asthma, histamine intolerance, ADHD, or inflammatory gene variants

Mitigation Strategies: Limiting high-salicylate foods, rotating dietary choices, balancing with antihistamine-supporting foods

6. Histamines

Found in: Aged cheese, fermented foods (kimchi, yogurt, kombucha), wine, processed meats

Risks: Triggers headaches, rashes, digestive issues, anxiety, insomnia in sensitive individuals

Who's at Risk: Those with histamine intolerance, mast cell disorders, poor DAO enzyme function, or methylation gene variants (e.g., MTHFR, COMT, MTRR variants)

Mitigation Strategies: Fresh foods overaged/fermented ones, supporting methylation pathways with appropriate nutrients

7. Glutamates (Including MSG & Natural Free Glutamate)

Found in: Aged cheese, soy sauce, bone broth, mushrooms, tomatoes

Risks: Can overstimulate the nervous system, leading to migraines and neuroinflammation

Who's at Risk: Those with neurological disorders, glutamate sensitivity, or poor Phase 2 detoxification function

Mitigation Strategies: Avoiding MSG, balancing with GABA-supporting foods and nutrients (e.g., magnesium, taurine)

8. FODMAPs

Found in: Garlic, onions, apples, wheat, legumes, dairy, cauliflower

Risks: Can cause bloating, gas, diarrhea, or constipation in individuals with compromised gut function

Who's at Risk: Those with IBS, SIBO, gut dysbiosis, or genetic variants affecting gut barrier function

Mitigation Strategies: Following a low-FODMAP diet initially, using digestive enzymes, gradual reintroduction of foods

9. Goitrogens

Found in: Cruciferous vegetables (broccoli, kale, Brussels sprouts, cabbage), soy

Risks: Can interfere with thyroid hormone production by blocking iodine uptake

Who's at Risk: Those with hypothyroidism, iodine deficiency, or thyroid-related genetic variants

Mitigation Strategies: Cooking cruciferous vegetables, ensuring adequate iodine intake

10. L-Glutamine Sensitivity

Found in: Protein powders, bone broth, dairy, meat, eggs

Risks: Converts to glutamate, which may cause neuroinflammation in genetically sensitive individuals

Who's at Risk: Those with poor Phase 2 detoxification function, neurological disorders, or glutamate sensitivity

Mitigation Strategies: Monitoring intake, balancing with GABA-supporting nutrients

11. Saponins

Found in: Quinoa, legumes, soy, nightshade vegetables

Risks: Can contribute to gut permeability and immune activation in sensitive individuals

Who's at Risk: Those with autoimmune diseases, leaky-gut, IBS, or inflammatory gene variants

Mitigation Strategies: Rinsing quinoa thoroughly, soaking and cooking legumes properly

12. Aflatoxins & Mycotoxins

Found in: Peanuts, corn, grains, coffee, stored nuts

Risks: Liver toxicity, immune suppression, carcinogenic effects

Who's at Risk: Those with detoxification impairments, mold sensitivities, or compromised liver function

Mitigation Strategies: Proper storage of nuts and grains, choosing mold-free sources, supporting detoxification pathways

13. Polyunsaturated Fatty Acids (PUFAs) – Omega-6 Excess

Found in: Vegetable oils (soybean, corn, canola, sunflower), processed foods

Risks: Can drive inflammation, oxidative stress, and metabolic dysfunction

Who's at Risk: Those with chronic inflammation, metabolic disorders, or genetic variants affecting fatty acid metabolism

Mitigation Strategies: Prioritizing omega-3 intake, using stable fats like coconut oil, reducing processed food consumption

14. Glycoalkaloids

Found in: Nightshade vegetables (potatoes, tomatoes, eggplants, peppers)

Risks: Can be neurotoxic and contribute to joint pain and digestive distress in sensitive individuals

Who's at Risk: Those with autoimmune conditions, neurological disorders, or inflammatory gene variants

Mitigation Strategies: Peeling potatoes, cooking nightshades properly, avoiding green potatoes

Beyond Genetics: The Complete Picture of Individual Response

While genetics provide a blueprint, your actual response to food compounds is determined by the complex interplay between your genes and your unique health history.

This includes epigenetic changes triggered by environmental exposures, medications, stress, infections, and lifestyle factors that can turn genes "on" or "off" and dramatically alter how you process these compounds.

The Epigenetic Layer: How Your Environment Shapes Gene Expression

Epigenetics explains why two people with identical genetic variants can have completely different responses to the same food. Key epigenetic factors include:

Environmental Toxin Exposure

- **Mold exposure** can upregulate inflammatory genes while downregulating detoxification capacity
- **Heavy metal accumulation** (like the antimony and silver found in industrial workers) can permanently alter cellular function
- **Chemical exposures** from pesticides, solvents, and industrial compounds create lasting changes in gene expression

Medical History and Interventions

- **Previous medications** (especially antibiotics, steroids, and chemotherapy) can alter gut microbiome and detox pathways for years
- **Surgical procedures and anesthesia** can trigger long-term inflammatory gene activation
- **Vaccination reactions** or allergic responses can create permanent immune system hypersensitivity

Infections and Immune Challenges

- **Chronic infections** (Lyme, EBV, candida) can maintain inflammatory gene expression indefinitely
- **Gut dysbiosis** from past antibiotic use alters how food compounds are metabolized

- **Autoimmune activation** changes how the immune system responds to normally harmless food proteins

Stress and Lifestyle Factors

- **Chronic stress** upregulates inflammatory pathways and downregulates detoxification
- **Sleep deprivation** impairs cellular repair and toxin clearance
- **Physical trauma** can create lasting changes in pain perception and inflammatory response

Key Genetic Variants That Influence Food Compound Sensitivity

Detoxification Genes

- **GSTM1 null variants:** Impaired ability to process toxins, making mycotoxins and environmental chemicals more harmful
- **Phase 1 vs Phase 2 imbalances:** When Phase 1 detox is fast, but Phase 2 is slow, toxic intermediates accumulate

Methylation Genes

- **MTHFR variants:** Reduced folate metabolism affecting detoxification and neurotransmitter production
- **COMT variants:** Altered dopamine and estrogen metabolism, affecting stress response and hormonal balance
- **MTRR variants:** Impaired B12 recycling affecting methylation capacity

Inflammatory Response Genes

- **TNFA variants:** Increased TNF-alpha production leading to heightened inflammatory responses
- **IL-6 variants:** Altered interleukin-6 signaling affecting recovery and inflammation
- **CRP variants:** Elevated C-reactive protein and increased cardiovascular risk

The Multi-Factorial Reality: Why Cookie-Cutter Approaches Fail

Your response to food compounds is determined by the intersection of multiple factors:

1. **Genetic Blueprint:** Your inherited capacity to process specific compounds
2. **Toxic Burden:** Accumulated environmental toxins competing for detox pathways
3. **Gut Health:** Microbiome composition affecting compound metabolism
4. **Inflammatory Status:** Current level of systemic inflammation
5. **Nutritional Status:** Deficiencies that impair processing capacity
6. **Stress Load:** Chronic stress affecting all biological systems
7. **Medical History:** Past treatments and exposures that altered gene expression

This is why the same "superfood" that heals one person can make another chronically ill, and why functional medicine approaches that work for some patients fail catastrophically for others.

Case Examples: When Genetics Meets Environment

Case 1: The Industrial Worker: A 64-year-old power plant worker developed severe neuropathy not from genetics alone, but from the toxic interaction between:

- **GSTM1 deletion:** Complete inability to detoxify heavy metals
- **39 years of chemical exposure:** Antimony levels 42x normal, silver 5x normal
- **SOD2 TT variant:** 33% reduction in cellular antioxidant capacity
- **Result:** Neurotoxic metals accumulated in nerve tissues, causing treatment-resistant burning neuropathy

Case 2: The CIRS Patient: A client's coffee sensitivity wasn't just about CYP1A2 variants, but the compounding effect of:

- **CYP1A2 slow variant:** Impaired caffeine metabolism
- **Mold exposure:** Compromised Phase 2 detoxification
- **Gut dysbiosis:** Altered microbiome affecting compound processing
- **Result:** Caffeine metabolites (paraxanthine) accumulated, causing anxiety and insomnia

Case 3: The Trigger Event: David's (YouHeal Founder) health collapse wasn't caused by genetics alone, but by:

- **Multiple genetic variants:** Over 50% of measured genes show variants
- **Mercury fillings at age 12:** Early toxic exposure with broken detox genetics preventing proper elimination
- **Epigenetic progression:** Decades of accumulated toxic burden gradually overwhelming cellular function
- **Allergy shot trigger:** Environmental exposure that activated dormant genetic vulnerabilities
- **Falling off the edge:** 42-years progression of epigenetic changes that made him increasingly sensitive to previously tolerated foods until complete system collapse
- **Result:** Foods that were once beneficial became toxic, requiring complete dietary overhaul

The YouHeal Approach: Precision Medicine for Complex Health Histories

Traditional functional medicine often applies to generic protocols based on symptoms alone, ignoring the critical interplay between genetics, toxic burden, and individual health history.

At YouHeal, we recognize that effective healing requires understanding and addressing all layers of your unique biological complexity.

Why Generic Approaches Fail

- **One-size-fits-all detox protocols** can overwhelm individuals with compromised Phase 2 detoxification
- **"Healthy" foods like spinach and almonds** become toxic for those with oxalate processing issues combined with gut dysbiosis
- **Sulfur-rich foods and supplements** worsen symptoms in people with CBS variants, especially those with high toxic burden
- **High-dose antioxidants** may cause harm in individuals with specific genetic variants and existing oxidative stress
- **Standard elimination diets** miss the genetic and environmental factors that determine true food sensitivity

YouHeal Comprehensive Assessment

Layer 1: Genetic Foundation

- YouHeal genetic analysis identifying variants affecting detoxification, methylation, inflammation, and nutrient processing
- Assessment of inherited strengths and vulnerabilities

Layer 2: Environmental History

- Detailed toxic exposure assessment (mold, chemicals, metals, medications)
- Hair mineral analysis to detect cellular-level metal accumulation
- Environmental toxin testing when indicated

Layer 3: Health Timeline Analysis

- Medical history review identifying trigger events and treatment responses
- Medication history and their lasting epigenetic effects
- Infection history and current gut health status

Layer 4: Current Functional Status

- Comprehensive symptom assessment and functional testing
- Gut microbiome analysis and permeability testing
- Inflammatory markers and nutritional status

Layer 5: Personalized Protocol Development

- Targeted interventions based on genetic capacity and toxic burden
- Sequential implementation to avoid overwhelming compromised systems
- Continuous monitoring and adjustment based on individual response

Practical Implementation: From Complexity to Clarity

Phase 1: Comprehensive Assessment

- **Genetic Testing:** Proper genetic analysis
- **Toxic Burden Assessment:** Hair mineral analysis and environmental exposure history
- **Health Timeline Review:** Detailed analysis of medical history, treatments, and trigger events
- **Current Status Evaluation:** Functional testing and symptom assessment

Phase 2: Elimination and Stabilization

- **Remove Primary Triggers:** Eliminate compounds based on genetic vulnerabilities AND toxic burden
- **Address Root Causes:** Begin targeted detoxification aligned with genetic capacity
- **Stabilize Foundation:** Support compromised pathways before adding complexity
- **Monitor Response:** Track improvements while avoiding overwhelming the system

Phase 3: Strategic Reintroduction

- **Gradual Food Testing:** Reintroduce foods using proper preparation methods
- **Genetic-Guided Prioritization:** Test foods in order of genetic compatibility
- **Environmental Consideration:** Account for current toxic load and stress levels
- **Individual Calibration:** Adjust based on unique response patterns and healing progress

Phase 4: Long-term Optimization and Adaptation

- **Dynamic Protocol Management:** Continuously adjust based on changing health status
- **Seasonal and Life Stage Adjustments:** Modify approach as toxic burden decreases and genetics "turn on"
- **Preventive Monitoring:** Regular assessment to prevent future accumulation and sensitivity
- **Lifestyle Integration:** Sustainable approaches that work with your unique biology

The Critical Difference: Timing and Sequence Matter

Traditional approaches often fail because they ignore the fundamental principle that the **ORDER** of interventions matters as much as the interventions themselves.

- **A person with heavy metal toxicity** may not tolerate sulfur-rich detox foods until metals are safely chelated
- **Someone with gut dysbiosis** may react to previously safe foods until microbiome balance is restored
- **Individuals with mold exposure** may need environmental remediation before any food compound can be properly processed
- **Those with medication-induced epigenetic changes** may require months of foundational support before normal foods become tolerable

Conclusion: The Precision Medicine Revolution in Nutrition

Food compound sensitivity is not simply a matter of genetics - it's the complex result of your genetic blueprint interacting with your unique environmental exposures, medical history, toxic burden, and current health status.

Understanding this multi-layered reality is essential for determining which foods support your healing versus which ones may be perpetuating your symptoms.

The revolutionary insight: your food sensitivities may not be permanent limitations but dynamic responses that can change as your underlying biology heals.

Foods that trigger reactions today may become beneficial tomorrow once the root causes - toxic burden, gut dysbiosis, inflammatory load, or nutrient deficiencies—are properly addressed.

This is why generic nutrition advice fails and why even sophisticated functional medicine approaches often miss the mark.

Without understanding the complete picture of genetics, environmental history, and current biological status, practitioners are essentially guessing at what might help.

At YouHeal, we've developed a comprehensive approach that integrates:

- **Genetic analysis** to understand your inherited capacities and vulnerabilities
- **Environmental assessment** to identify toxic burdens affecting gene expression
- **Health history analysis** to understand epigenetic changes from past exposures
- **Functional testing** to assess current biological status and healing capacity
- **Personalized protocols** that work WITH your unique biology rather than against it

The result is not just symptom management, but actual healing - where foods that once caused problems become allies in your recovery, and your body regains its natural resilience and vitality.

Your genetics are not your destiny. Your environment and history matter. And most importantly, with the right approach, your body has an extraordinary capacity to heal and adapt.

The future of medicine is not about managing symptoms or following generic protocols—it's about understanding and working with the magnificent complexity that makes you uniquely you.

This information represents the cutting edge of precision medicine and should be implemented under the guidance of trained practitioners familiar with genetics-based protocols. If you're ready to discover what your body has been trying to tell you, and why previous approaches may have failed, comprehensive genetic and environmental assessment through YouHeal may provide the answers you've been seeking.

David Craine, CEO - YouHeal

17 years neurologically disabled (Now I'm Not!!!)