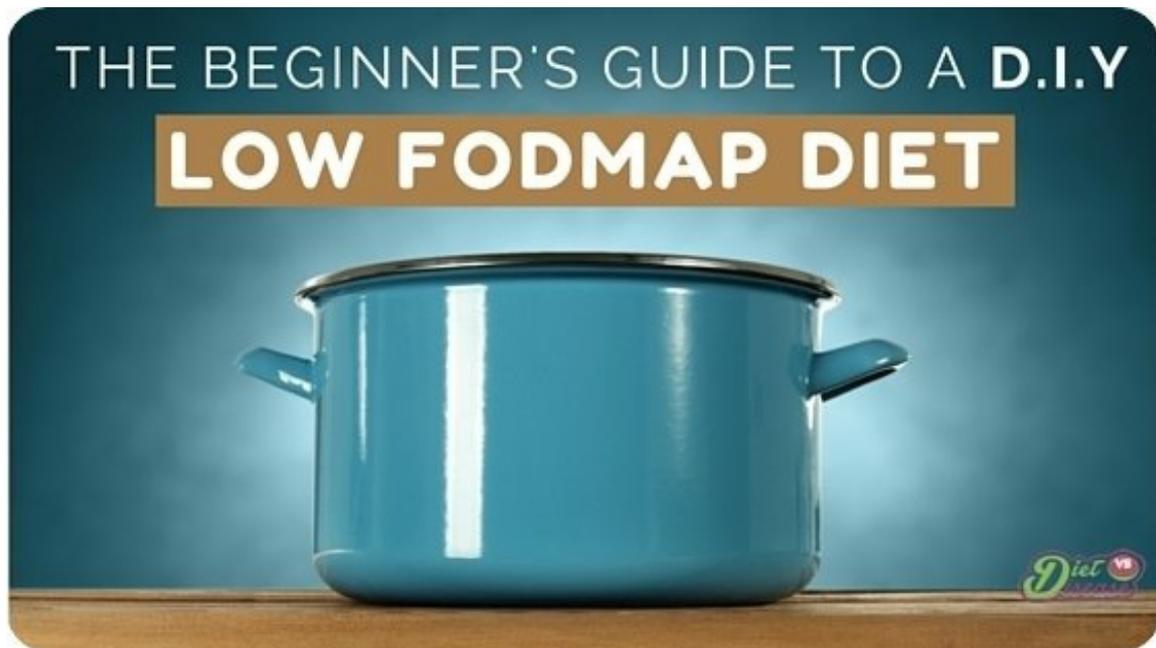


The Beginner's Guide To A D.I.Y Low FODMAP Diet



Do you often experience digestive stress after eating certain foods?

Can the discomfort be so severe that it affects your day-to-day activities?

The link between foods and digestive disorders is well recognised, and there is a good chance that FODMAPs – small carbohydrates in certain foods – are the culprit.

As a clinical dietitian, I've seen how remarkable a low-FODMAP diet can be for people with chronic gastrointestinal symptoms. Things like recurrent bloating, gas, cramps, diarrhoea or constipation.

If you're keen to learn more, and maybe even try a low FODMAP diet for yourself, this 3,000 word beginner's guide is the best place to start.

What You'll Learn:

- What is FODMAPs and who should be concerned
- Common FODMAPs listed on food labels, and where gluten fits in to the picture
- The best studies behind a low FODMAP diet
- An all inclusive low FODMAP shopping list
- 21 recipe ideas
- Probiotics and their role in the diet
- A sample low FODMAP diet plan and ideas when dining out.

What is low FODMAP and who is it for?

A low FODMAP diet refers to a temporary eating pattern that has a very low amount of food compounds called FODMAPs.

The acronym (as described by co-creator [Sue Shepard](#)) stands for:

- **Fermentable** – meaning they are broken down (fermented) by bacteria in the large bowel
- **Oligosaccharides** – “oligo” means “few” and “saccharide” means sugar. These molecules are made up of individual sugars joined together in a chain
- **Disaccharides** – “di” means two. This is a double sugar molecule
- **Monosaccharides** – “mono” means single. This is a single sugar molecule
- **And Polyols** – these are sugar alcohols (however, they don't lead to intoxication!)



Let's stick with the term FODMAPs shall we?

Those saccharides and polyols are short-chain carbohydrates that, if poorly digested, ferment in the lower part of your large intestine (bowel). This fermentation process draws in water and produces carbon dioxide, hydrogen, and/or methane gas that causes the intestine to stretch and expand.

The result is strong pain, bloating, visible abdominal distension and other related symptoms (1).

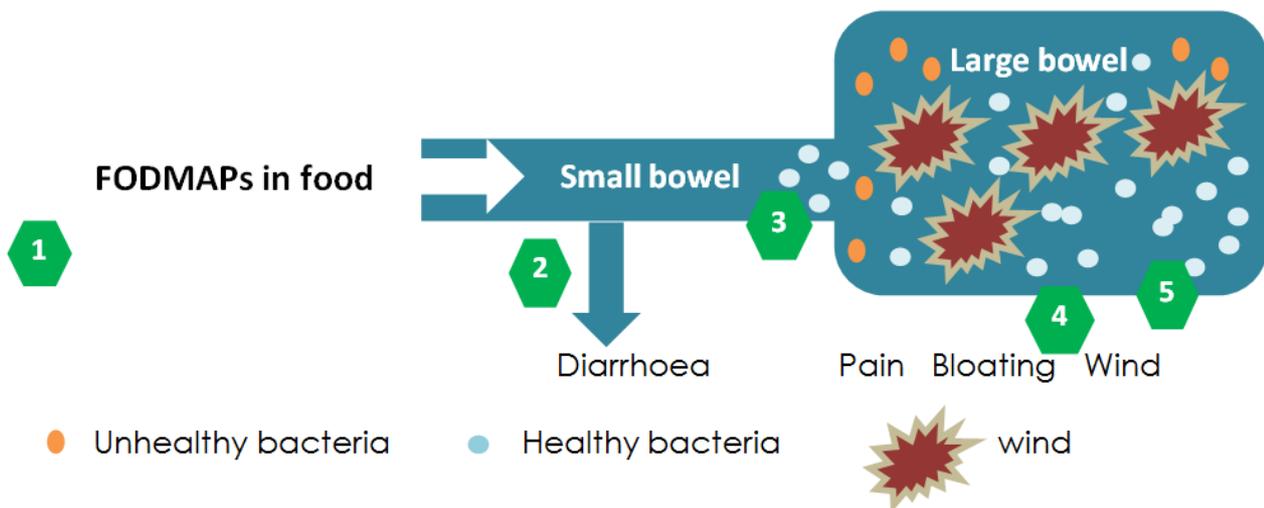


Image [source](#).

Who is a low FODMAP diet for?

As its primary use is to relieve digestion-related symptoms, this diet can be useful for those with:

- Irritable Bowel Syndrome ([IBS](#))- more on that below
- Other forms of Functional Gastrointestinal Disorder ([FGID](#))
- Small intestinal bacterial overgrowth ([SIBO](#))

- Certain auto-immune conditions/diseases like rheumatoid arthritis, multiple sclerosis or eczema
- [Fibromyalgia](#) or other health issues you've noticed are triggered by certain foods.

Summary: FODMAPS are short-chain carbohydrates that, if poorly digested, ferment in the bowel to cause severe digestive stress. A low FODMAP diet is designed to temporarily restrict the amount of FODMAPs consumed and is useful for treating conditions like IBS.

Common FODMAPS and what to look for on the label

Common FODMAPs in your food include:

- **Fructose:** A sugar found in most fruits and vegetables.
- **Lactose:** A sugar found in dairy foods like milk.
- **Fructans:** Very similar to fructose, found in many vegetables and grains
- **Galactans:** Found primarily in legumes.
- **Polyols:** Sugar alcohols like [xylitol](#), sorbitol, maltitol and mannitol. You find them mainly in artificial sweeteners and chewing gum.

Best practice is to read the ingredients label for other added FODMAP ingredients such as inulin (chicory root), natural flavors, high fructose corn syrup, agave, honey, etc.



What about gluten?

While gluten can also trigger food sensitivities in a handful of people, it is a protein, not a carbohydrate.

Therefore gluten **cannot** be classified as a FODMAP.

[Want the PDF \(printable\) of this article?](#)

However, gluten-free products do still appear beneficial for those with FODMAP sensitivities. [Testing from Australia's Monash University](#) shows that gluten-free products almost always have reduced amounts of fructans and oligosaccharides.

That means gluten-free products are generally lower in FODMAPs, and free of gluten of course.

Summary: FODMAPs exist mainly in dairy, legumes, and many fruits and vegetables. While gluten is not technically a FODMAP, gluten-free products are typically lower in FODMAPs anyway.

A low FODMAP diet is very restrictive and designed to be temporary

Before we go any further, it's important to clarify that following a low FODMAP diet is *very restrictive* and cuts out numerous common foods and food groups.

That means you need to reintroduce foods at some stage, so it cannot be a permanent solution.

The idea is that restricting all FODMAPs at once should have a far greater and more consistent effect than simply restricting one FODMAP in isolation. With all FODMAPs out of your diet, it gives your gut bacteria a chance to correct any imbalances, and your gut some time to heal.

After several weeks you can then start to slowly reintroduce each FODMAP type to see what triggers symptoms. Once the trigger foods have been identified, you will know what you can and cannot eat. So it's basically a specialised form of [elimination or exclusion diet](#).



Summary: *A low FODMAP diet is not designed to be permanent. It is highly restrictive for several weeks, before foods are slowly reintroduced to determine what causes symptoms.*

IBS and studies that support a low FODMAP diet

Much of the research has been on patients with Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS).

IBS is a chronic gastrointestinal disorder characterised by abdominal pain and altered bowel habits, and around two thirds of IBS patients report their symptoms are related to food. It's now estimated to affect 11% of the population globally, up to 13% in Australia and up to a whopping 20% in the US and UK (2, 3).

The highest quality evidence to date was a 2014 Australian clinical trial that compared the effects of a low FODMAP diet between 30 IBS patients and 8 similar individuals without IBS (to act as a control group for comparison).

Participants were randomly assigned to receive either a diet low in FODMAPs (less than 3 grams per day) or a typical Australian diet for 21 days. This was followed by a long "washout period", before crossing over to the alternate diet for another 21 days. Almost all food was provided to the participants, and breath hydrogen and stool samples were collected frequently (4).

This is what happened:



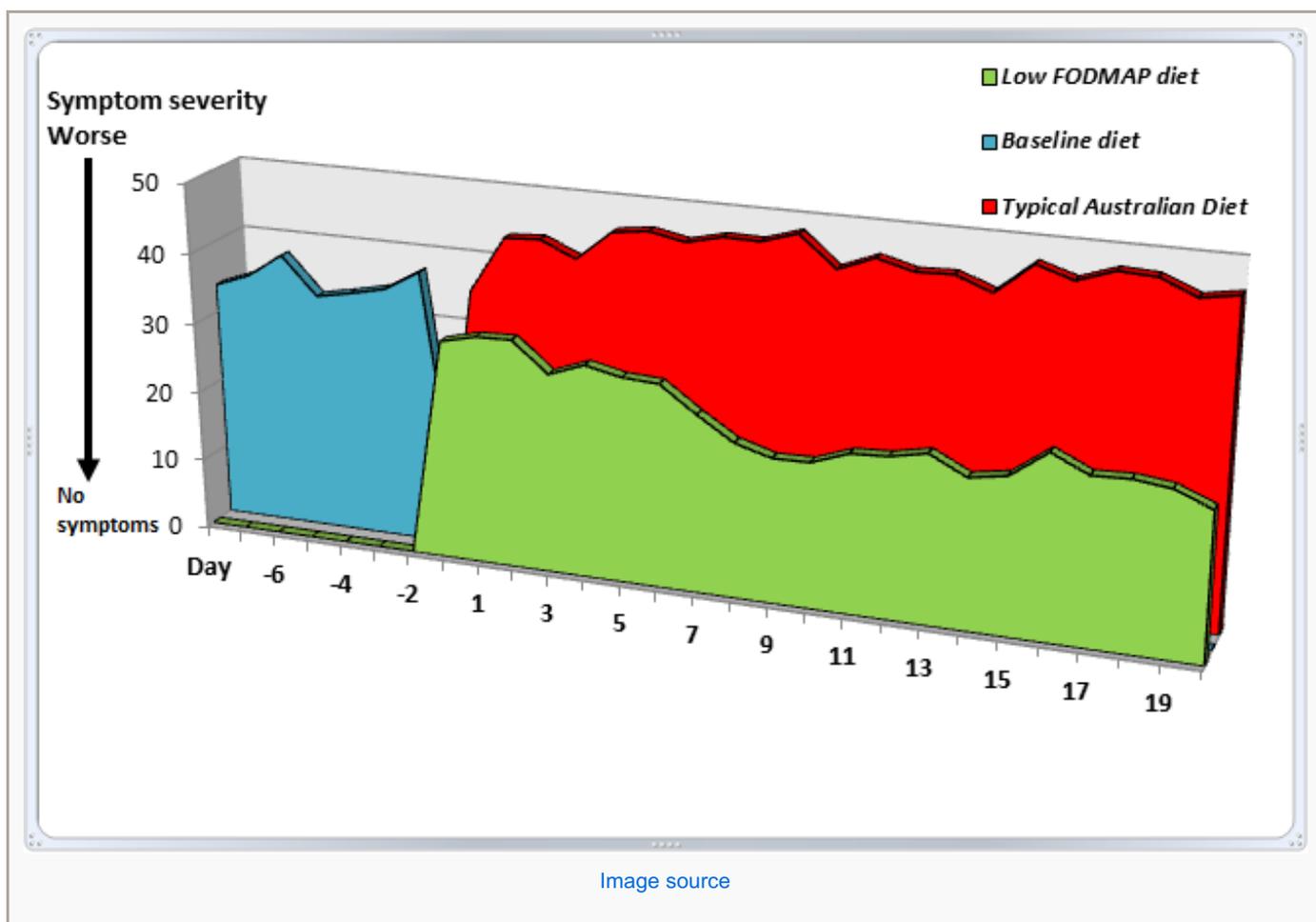


Image source

IBS symptoms were reduced by 50% overall on the low FODMAP diet, with the greatest improvements observed one week after implementing the diet. More specifically, improvements were seen for bloating, abdominal pain, wind and dissatisfaction with stool consistency.

Numerous similar studies (albeit not as well designed) have found very similar benefits, and the overall average success rate is about 68-76% of patients (5, 6).

Research in this area still has a way to go, but scientific consensus is that a low FODMAP diet should be the first dietary approach for treatment of recurrent gastro-intestinal issues.

Summary: *Controlled trials continue to find that a well-designed and supervised low FODMAP diet improves symptoms by about 50% in as little as one week. The average success rate is 68-75% of patients that try it.*

The essential low FODMAP food list for shopping

The following is a list of foods that are **low in FODMAPs**.

It's arguably the most complete free list available as I compiled the best of other great list sources including the [Journal of Gastroenterology and Hepatology](#), and [Kate Scarlata](#). I recommend you save this to use as a shopping guide, alongside the Monash University [FODMAPs app](#) (does cost but worth it).

There are some important notes below the list you should read too.

LOW FODMAPs SHOPPING LIST

This is a list of foods low in FODMAPs that you can use as a shopping guide

VEGETABLES

Alfalfa sprouts
Bamboo shoots
Bean sprouts
Beets (limit to 4 slices)
Bokchoy
Bell peppers (Capsicum)
Broccoli (limit 1/2 cup)
Brussels sprouts (limit 1/2 cup)
Butternut squash (limit to 1/2cup)
Carrots
Corn (half a cob)
Celery (limit to 1 stick)
Chives
Cucumber
Chilli
Eggplant
Endive
Fennel
Ginger
Green beans
Green peas (limit to ½ cup)
Kale
Leek
Lettuce
Olives
Pumpkin (limit to ½ cup)
Parsnip
Peas (limit to 1/3 cup)
Potato, white
Radishes
Swede
Seaweed (nori)
Scallions (green part only)
Spinach
Summer squash
Sweet potato (limit to 1/2 cup)
Turnips
Tomato
Water chestnuts
Zucchini

FRUIT

Avocado (limit to 1/4)
Banana (small)
Blueberries
Cantaloupe (Rockmelon)
Cranberries
Cherries (limit to 3)
Grapefruit
Grapes
Honeydew melon
Kiwifruit
Lemon
Lime
Longon (limit to 10)
Lychee (limit to 5)
Mandarin
Orange
Pomegranate (limit to ½)
Passion fruit
Pineapple
Raspberries
Rhubarb
Strawberries
Tamarind
Tangelo
Paw paw
Papaya

PROTEIN FOODS

Beef
Chicken
Chickpeas and Lentils (drained)
Fish
Egg
Kangaroo
Lamb
Pork
Shellfish (including prawns, crab, shrimp, etc)
Tofu
Turkey
Tempeh

NUTS & SEEDS

Almonds
Chestnuts
Chia seeds
Macadamias
Other varieties of nut-butter
(eg. Almond nut-butter)
Peanuts
Pecans
Pine nuts
Pumpkin seeds
Peanut butter
Sesame seeds
Sunflower seeds
Walnuts

DAIRY

CHEESE

Cheddar
Swiss
Parmesan
Brie
Feta
Camembert
Cream cheese
Mozzarella

MILK

Lactose free (Any lactose-free dairy products)
Greek yogurt
Whipped cream
Butter
Kefir

NON-DAIRY ALTERNATIVES

Coconut milk (limit to ½ cup)
Rice milk
Almond milk
Soy milk

GRAINS

Oats
Oat bran
Quinoa
Rice: white and brown
Rice bran
Gluten-free breads (choose white breads)
Bread made from oats, rice, corn,
spelt and potato flours
Buckwheat
Popcorn
Corn chips
Polenta
Sourdough

DRINKS

Coffee (no milk)
Tea (weak and no milk)
Orange juice (limit to 1/3 cup)
Very small amounts of wine, gin, vodka,
whiskey

CONDIMENTS

Mustard
Fish sauce
Soy sauce
Oyster sauce
Worcestershire sauce
Sweet and sour sauce
Chutney
Mayonnaise
Shrimp paste
Vegetable
Balsamic vinegar (limit to 2 tsp)
Wasabi
Rice wine vinegar

SWEETS AND SWEETENERS

Maple syrup
Sugar
Stevia
Dark chocolate
Sorbet
Gelato

COOKING OILS, HERBS AND SPICES

All oils generally acceptable

Herbs: Basil, Cilantro, Coriander, Curry
leaves, Fenugreek, Gotukala, Lemongrass,
Mint, Oregano, Pandan, Parsley, Rampa,
Rosemary, Tarragon, Thyme

Spices: All spice, Black pepper, Cardamon,
Chilli powder, Cinnamon, Cloves, Cumin,
Curry powder, Fennel seeds, Five spice,
Goraka, Mustard seeds, Nutmeg, Paprika,
Saffron, Star anise, Turmeric, salt.

Many legumes not included on this list (such as kidney beans and split peas) can be made far more digestible and low FODMAP by [pre-soaking for 7-24 hours](#).

Also note that like with anything food related, **portion size is fundamental**. A serving of almonds are considered low FODMAP, but if you eat an entire bowl of almonds then you will end up eating a high amount of FODMAPs.

As with anything we eat, the dose makes the poison.

(I did not make a list of **high FODMAP foods** so to avoid confusion. If you are interested to see what you definitely must avoid, I recommend looking [here](#) and [here](#).)

***Summary:** Above is an essential list of low FODMAP foods that you can take with you when grocery shopping. Remember that many of these foods still contain trace amounts, so portion size is fundamental.*

Low FODMAP recipe ideas

Appropriate recipes are those low in total FODMAPs, yet still nutritious and simple to make (and delicious of course).

To save you time searching around all day, I've compiled a list of **21 FODMAP-Friendly Recipes For Home and Work**. It has ideas for mains and snacks that are not only family-friendly, but easy to bring to work too. You can get it here:

[Get The Recipes Now](#)

Probiotics may help ease symptoms

Recent data suggests there is a strong link between the balance of our gut bacteria (its composition) and health. An imbalance of this bacterial “community” – known medically as gut [dysbiosis](#) – can cause many problems... especially gut issues.

[Probiotics](#) is the term used to describe the bacteria we eat specifically for to restore this balance and improve health. Additional probiotics in the diet has been shown to improve a range of health aspects from gut health to [weight loss](#).

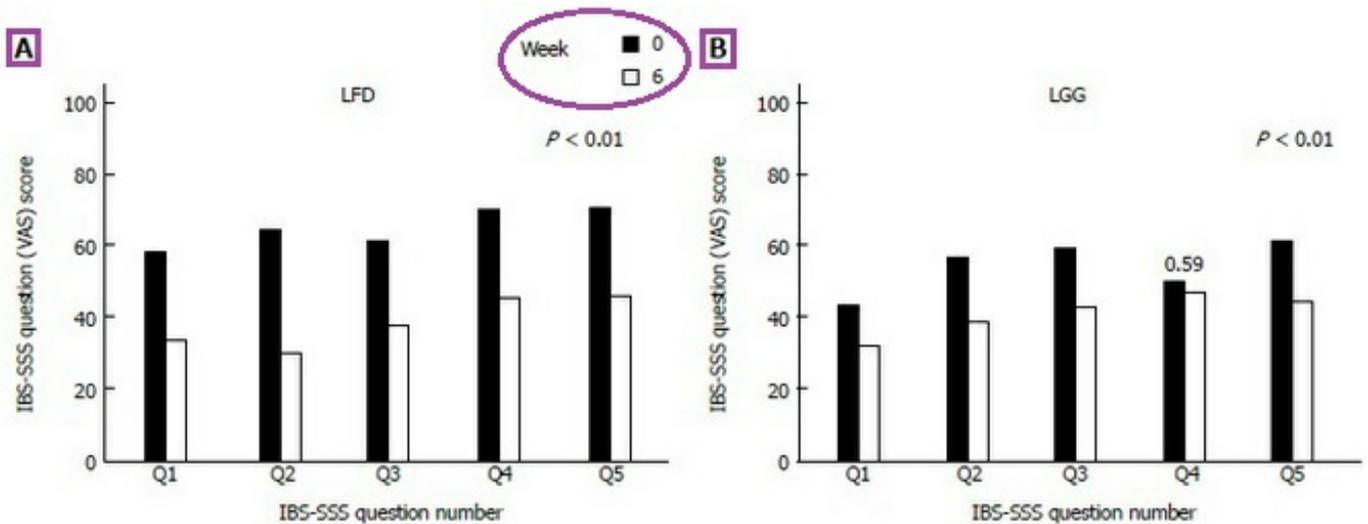


So how does this relate to FODMAPs?

Well it's thought that fermentation of FODMAPs directly upsets the bacterial balance in our gut. In fact, growing evidence shows that many subgroups of IBS patients have a highly irregular gut bacterial environment (7).

The question posed now is will the addition of “good” bacteria – from probiotics – help to manage FODMAP sensitivities? The research is promising.

A 6-week Danish study randomly assigned 123 IBS patients to either a low FODMAP diet, a regular Danish diet supplemented with two daily doses of *Lactobacillus* (probiotic), or just a regular Danish diet. Results found that both the intervention diets led to clinically significant improvements in symptom severity, although low FODMAPS was still best (8).



Changes in self-reported symptom severity can be seen in the low FODMAP diet group (figure A) and the Lactobacillus group (figure B) from the study's start point until week 6. These data suggest that probiotic supplementation may be a useful treatment tool, although the mechanism is still not understood.

The question that comes to my mind is: What about probiotics **alongside** a low FODMAP diet?

This hasn't been studied yet, but I suspect it could be very beneficial, especially considering that probiotic supplementation does not typically have side-effects. There might be a week or so of unpleasantness, but the ability to tolerate a wider variety of foods in the long-run is well worth that initial discomfort.

You could start by trialling some probiotic rich foods like [quark](#), kefir yoghurt and [pickled vegetables](#) such as [sauerkraut](#). Supplementation is another popular alternative, but whole foods are best.

***Summary:** Poorly absorbed FODMAPs are thought to directly upset the bacterial balance in our gut. In line with this theory, regular probiotic supplementation has been shown to effectively reduce symptom severity in IBS patients. I suspect that the addition of probiotics to a low FODMAP diet will be very beneficial.*

A low FODMAP diet plan and dining out ideas

Diet plans are generally tailored to individual patients as we all have different eating habits and preferences.

But to give you an example that you would get from a specialist dietitian during the elimination phase, here is what one day would look like. I've incorporated some probiotics and several of the recipes ideas from above:

- **Breakfast:** Oats (1/2 cup cooked) topped with almonds + blueberries (fresh or frozen)
- **Lunch:** Curried parsnip and coconut soup (easy to bring to work)
- **Dinner:** Low FODMAP fish tacos with a side of sauerkraut



- **Snack Ideas (if you snack):** 200 grams lactose-free yogurt + strawberries OR Blueberry + coconut smoothie OR low FODMAP fruit (tolerated by most)
- **Drinks:** Tea or Coffee (lactose-free milk if you like)

[Want the PDF \(printable\) of this article?](#)

There are also pre-packaged foods formulated to be low in FODMAPs if you prefer the convenience. For Australians you should check out [Fodmapped products](#) available at Coles- it's the world's first dedicated FODMAP brand.

For those in the UK [here is a great list](#) of common food products that are low FODMAP. This list [here](#) appears to be for those in the US, but I was unable to find more at this stage.

Low FODMAP dining out ideas

Set meal plans aren't particularly useful when you're eating out at a restaurant or takeaway shop. Here are some food choice tips to help you make appropriate choices:

- Ask for gluten-free bread (preferably white)
- Breads or cereals made from oats for breakfast
- Coffee or tea with lactose-free milk
- Lactose-free yogurt served with low FODMAP fruits (Greek yogurt is okay too but still has some FODMAPs)
- Smoothies made with lactose-free milk and low FODMAP fruits and vegetables
- Low FODMAP salad with nuts, seeds, extra virgin olive oil & fresh squeezed lemon
- Roasted, steamed or grilled low FODMAP vegetables
- Choose meat, fish, egg or tofu dishes that are plain (separate from sauces/gravies)
- Chicken with egg mayonnaise or beef with mustard
- Small French fries is okay at fast-food restaurant (although not encouraged obviously)
- Carrot and cucumber sticks with hummus as starter or snack
- Beef nachos on corn chips
- Curry dishes with rice is generally okay, but it depends on the curry paste used.
- Popcorn at the cinema
- Sushi and sashimi with soy sauce and wasabi
- Fill a thermos with lactose-free milk or almond milk to add to oats/oatmeal when traveling.



Summary: *At the beginning of a low FODMAP diet it's much easier if you prepare your own meals at home, just to get familiar. And while it can seem overwhelming at first, trends start to emerge between what you can eat at home and dining out.*

DIY or do I need help from a Dietitian?

As you can see the low FODMAP diet is complex.

This is generalised advice and may be difficult to do yourself without professional guidance.

In fact, it has only ever been evaluated formally as a dietitian-delivered diet. Group education sessions have recently been used with success, but it's traditionally done in a one-on-one setting so that any diet modifications are individualized.

That said, it certainly could be done on your own, but you must be **highly motivated**.

Safely removing and reintroducing the appropriate foods takes a lot of learning upfront, but countless satisfied patients can tell you it's worth it. I strongly recommend you follow [Kate Scarlata](#) for useful guides.

If you have additional questions, or would prefer some guidance with your low FODMAP diet, please [contact me here](#).