HEALTH & WELLNESS

Low Oxalate Diet Foods To Avoid

Published: November 20, 2026 | Index ID: #-

Understanding Oxalates and Why a Low Oxalate Diet Matters

Oxalates are naturally occurring compounds found in a wide variety of plant foods. While they serve as a defense mechanism for plants, in the human body, oxalates can bind with calcium to form crystals. For most people, this process is harmless, but for individuals prone to calcium oxalate kidney stones, those with certain digestive disorders, or those who experience oxalate sensitivity, consuming high levels of oxalates can lead to discomfort, inflammation, and health complications. A low oxalate diet is often recommended by healthcare professionals to reduce the risk of kidney stones and to manage conditions such as vulvodynia, interstitial cystitis, and oxalate dumping syndrome. This article provides a comprehensive guide to the foods you need to avoid when following a low oxalate diet, helping you make informed dietary choices without feeling overwhelmed.

What is a Low Oxalate Diet?

A low oxalate diet restricts the intake of foods that contain high levels of oxalates. Typically, a daily oxalate intake of 40–50 milligrams or less is considered low, though individual tolerance varies. The primary goal is to reduce the amount of oxalates that reach the kidneys, thereby decreasing the likelihood of stone formation. However, it is important to note that not all high oxalate foods need to be eliminated entirely; in many cases, portion control and pairing with calcium-rich foods can help mitigate the risks. Nevertheless, for those who need a stricter approach, knowing which foods to avoid is crucial.

High Oxalate Foods to Avoid: The Main Offenders

The following list covers the most common foods that contain high levels of oxalates. If you are following a low oxalate diet, these are the primary items you should limit or avoid altogether. Always check with your healthcare provider for personalized advice.

Leafy Greens High in Oxalates

Many leafy greens are nutritional powerhouses, but some are also extremely high in oxalates. Spinach is perhaps the most notable offender, containing over 600 milligrams of oxalates per 100 grams. Swiss chard, beet greens, and rhubarb leaves are also very high. While these greens offer valuable vitamins and minerals, their oxalate content can cause problems for sensitive individuals. Instead, consider low oxalate alternatives such as romaine lettuce, arugula, cabbage, and kale (in moderation, as kale has moderate oxalate levels).

Beets and Beet Products

Beets are rich in antioxidants and nutrients, but they are also one of the highest oxalate vegetables. Both the root and the greens are problematic. A single half-cup of cooked beets can contain over 75 milligrams of oxalates. Beet juice and beet powder supplements are especially concentrated. For those on a low oxalate diet, it is best to avoid beets entirely and choose other root vegetables like carrots, turnips, or parsnips, which are much lower in oxalates.

Rhubarb

Rhubarb is widely recognized as exceptionally high in oxalates, particularly the leaves, which contain toxic levels and should never be eaten. Even the stalks, when consumed in large amounts, contribute significantly to oxalate

load. A single half-cup of cooked rhubarb can contain around 200 milligrams of oxalates. If you need a tart flavor in cooking, consider using low oxalate options like cranberries or lemon juice instead.

Nuts and Seeds: Watch Your Portions

Nuts and seeds are healthy sources of fats and protein, but many are concentrated sources of oxalates. Almonds, peanuts, pecans, and sunflower seeds are particularly high. For example, a quarter-cup of almonds contains about 50 milligrams of oxalates. Cashews and walnuts have moderate levels. Flaxseeds, sesame seeds (including tahini), and chia seeds are also high. If you enjoy nuts, opt for low oxalate options such as macadamia nuts, coconut, or pumpkin seeds (in moderation). Portion control is key; even low oxalate nuts can add up if eaten in large quantities.

Chocolate and Cocoa Products

Dark chocolate, cocoa powder, and processed chocolate products are surprisingly high in oxalates. Cocoa beans naturally contain significant amounts, and a single ounce of dark chocolate can provide 50–100 milligrams of oxalates. Milk chocolate has less cocoa solids and therefore lower oxalate levels, but it still contributes. For those with extreme sensitivity, any chocolate should be avoided or limited to very small quantities of white chocolate (which is made from cocoa butter and contains negligible oxalates). Consider carob as a low oxalate alternative, though it is not a perfect substitute in all recipes.

Certain Fruits: Berries and Starfruit

While most fruits are low to moderate in oxalates, some stand out as high. Starfruit (carambola) is extremely high and can be dangerous for individuals with kidney issues, not just because of oxalates but also neurotoxins. Berries, specifically raspberries, blackberries, and strawberries, contain moderate to high levels. A cup of raspberries has around 5–10 milligrams, which is a moderate amount, but those on a strict diet may need to limit them. Kiwi, figs, and dates are also moderately high. Safe options include apples, bananas, melons, grapes, and citrus fruits (oranges, lemons, limes).

Grains and Legumes: Surprising Sources

Whole grains and legumes are often recommended for fiber, but some are high in oxalates. Buckwheat, amaranth, and millet are the worst offenders among grains. Oats and whole wheat are moderate. Legumes such as soybeans (and tofu, tempeh, edamame), navy beans, and pinto beans are high. Peanuts (technically legumes) are also listed here. Refined grains like white rice, white bread, and pasta are much lower in oxalates because the processing removes the outer hull where oxalates concentrate. For those avoiding oxalates, choose white rice, cornmeal, and sprouted grain products with caution.

Potatoes and Sweet Potatoes

Potatoes are a staple in many diets, but they contain moderate to high levels of oxalates, especially the skins. A medium baked potato with skin can have about 15–25 milligrams of oxalates. Sweet potatoes vary but are generally higher than white potatoes. If you enjoy potatoes, consider peeling them and boiling rather than baking, which can reduce oxalate content. Alternatively, choose lower oxalate substitutes like cauliflower, jicama, or celery root.

Spices and Condiments

Spices can significantly increase the oxalate content of a meal when used liberally. Turmeric, cumin, ginger, black pepper, and cinnamon are particularly high. Oregano, basil, and thyme also contain notable amounts. Soy sauce, miso, and Worcestershire sauce (which may contain molasses) can be hidden sources. For flavoring, consider using low oxalate herbs like dill, chives, parsley (in small amounts), and shallots. Use spices sparingly and avoid concentrated spice blends.

Hidden Oxalates in Beverages

Drinks can be overlooked when listing high oxalate foods. Dark beer, black tea, instant coffee, and cocoa drinks are high in oxalates. A single cup of black tea can contain 5–10 milligrams, but the concentration varies. Green tea has lower oxalates than black tea, but still moderate. Herbal teas such as chamomile and peppermint are generally safe. Sodas, fruit juices (especially from high oxalate fruits like berries), and bottled iced teas should be checked. The safest beverages are plain water, milk (dairy or almond milk in moderation), and clear broths.

Foods That Are Surprisingly Low in Oxalates

To help you build a satisfying low oxalate diet, here are some foods generally considered safe (always check individual tolerance):

- Vegetables: Cauliflower, broccoli, cabbage, cucumbers, zucchini, bell peppers, asparagus, mushrooms, onions, garlic, lettuce, celery, radishes.
- Fruits: Apples, bananas, grapes, melons, oranges, pears, peaches, plums, cranberries, pineapple, coconut.
- Proteins: Most meats, poultry, fish, eggs, and dairy products (milk, cheese, yogurt) are naturally very low in oxalates.
- Grains: White rice, cornmeal, quinoa (in moderation), oats (in moderation), refined pasta and bread.
- Fats: Olive oil, butter, ghee, avocado oil, coconut oil.
- Nuts and Seeds: Macadamia nuts, pecans (low to moderate), pumpkin seeds (in small amounts), coconut.

Tips for Reducing Oxalates in Your Diet

Even if you choose to keep some high oxalate foods, certain preparation methods can lower their oxalate content. Boiling vegetables in water reduces oxalates more effectively than steaming or roasting, because oxalates leach into the cooking water (which you should discard). Pairing high oxalate foods with calcium-rich foods (such as cheese, yogurt, or milk) helps bind oxalates in the gut so they are excreted rather than absorbed. Drinking plenty of water throughout the day dilutes urine and reduces the risk of crystal formation. Avoid vitamin C supplements super dosing, as ascorbic acid can be converted to oxalate in the body.

Who Should Follow a Low Oxalate Diet?

This diet is most commonly prescribed for patients who form calcium oxalate kidney stones, the most common type of kidney stone. It may also be recommended for people with gut disorders such as inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), short bowel syndrome, or after gastric bypass surgery, where oxalate absorption is increased. Some practitioners use it for chronic pain conditions like fibromyalgia or vulvodynia, though evidence is mixed. Always consult a doctor or registered dietitian before making major dietary changes, especially because a low oxalate diet may limit fiber, B vitamins, and other nutrients found in high oxalate plant foods.

Conclusion

Navigating a low oxalate diet requires awareness of the foods you eat, but it does not have to be restrictive or bland. By understanding which foods to avoid—such as spinach, beets, rhubarb, almonds, chocolate, and certain spices—you can tailor a meal plan that supports your health while minimizing oxalate load. Remember that not all high oxalate foods need to be eliminated; portion control, proper cooking techniques, and pairing with calcium can make many items acceptable. Always work with a healthcare professional to monitor your nutrient intake and adjust as needed. With the right knowledge, you can enjoy a varied and nutritious diet while keeping your oxalate levels in

check.

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