



"Optimum nutrition is the medicine of tomorrow."

— Linus Pauling



What am I going to eat now? That's the question you're probably asking yourself. This next chapter will discuss what REAL foods are best for you to eat to help manage your gastrointestinal symptoms and nourish your body to facilitate the healing process.

Keep in mind that no one really knows what you should eat. No dietitian, nutritionist, or doctor can give you a definitive list of what you can and can't eat. Don't trust anyone who says otherwise. You'll have a bit of work to do, as described in Chapter 5, to figure this out for yourself. But the good news is that most of the foods in this category should be well tolerated by all people with tummy troubles. Use the elimination diet protocol to assess your personal tolerance to each one. Your body will tell you what works for you—you just have to learn how to listen.

## ANIMAL PROTEIN

Animal protein is underrated in this recent era of "Meatless Mondays." The truth is that vegetarian sources of protein, such as beans, lentils, soy, and nuts, can be very hard to digest, especially for an already-impaired digestive tract. The proteins in soy are highly allergenic, while beans and lentils are high in FODMAPs and starches can feed a bacterial overgrowth. Animal protein is a safer, superior option, for reasons we'll discuss.

Protein from animal sources has the highest quality. Unlike vegetarian protein, animal protein is complete because it contains all the amino acids (protein building blocks) in balance. There are 21 different amino acids required for human health, and not having enough of only one of them is enough to prevent your body from accomplishing its daily tasks. The right balance of all amino acids is required to build and repair muscles and tissues as well as synthesize hormones, proteins for your immune system, and other proteins to transport vitamins, minerals, cholesterol, and fat inside your body.

Getting the right balance of all the amino acids is important for the production of neurotransmitters like serotonin, dopamine, and GABA. These neurotransmitters are like messengers that communicate with your brain to help you feel happy and relaxed and calm anxiety and cravings. Serotonin, synthesized from the amino acid tryptophan found in animal protein, is thought to have an important role in promoting intestinal motility. Serotonin also influences the perception of pain and the amount of fluid secreted in your intestines, which plays an important role in your IBS symptoms.

## HEALING, REPAIR, AND HEALTHY WEIGHT

Why is animal protein important for your digestive health? If your intestines are damaged, your body needs high-quality protein to repair them. Some people with digestive issues are underweight because the food they eat just seems to pass right through. If this is your case, eating animal protein at each meal is essential to prevent further wasting and help you put on weight.

Some people who struggle with their digestion actually have the opposite problem and can't seem to be able to lose weight. If you are overweight, it is most likely due to ongoing inflammation in your body, from food intolerances and constant damage to your intestines. Low-grade systemic inflammation levels lead to elevated cortisol, a stress hormone that decreases your body's ability to burn fat and promotes weight gain. In that case, dieting is definitely not the answer. Excess weight can also be attributed to uncontrollable cravings for sugars, starches, and other processed foods that result from a gut dysbiosis or gastrointestinal infection. Eating high-quality protein, the most satiating of all nutrients, at each meal can help you get your cravings under control and keep you feeling full longer to help you reach your body's natural healthy weight. A diet based on REAL food is the best place to start to normalize your weight, whether you are underweight or overweight.

Protein also has the advantage of not feeding a bacterial overgrowth (SIBO), a yeast infection, or any other source of gut dysbiosis. Little bugs like bacteria, yeast, and parasites love sugars, starches, and carbs, but fortunately don't seem to be really interested in protein.