



The new gut-healing diets cut entire food groups, but fruit is still on the menu.

foods would repair my GI tract and help me lose weight, and it explained that I could prepare them however I liked. Sugar, dairy, caffeine, and all other foods were forbidden.

For five days, I stuck to the plan (turkey sausage, spinach salad, etc.), but I was moody and jonesing for coffee the whole time. On Day Six, a morning weigh-in revealed I had lost 2 pounds, but when I got to the office, my cubicle mate told me she wasn't a fan of my newfound "energy" (read: manic bitchiness). So I called nutritionist Lisa Young, an adjunct professor at New York University, to see if she thought I should keep going. "If a diet has you cut entire foods groups, it's going to drive you nuts," she said. *Mmm, nuts, yum!*

She was right, though: I was sick of the foods, quinoa especially. (The gluten-free grain is pretty sad without accoutrements like pine nuts, feta, and colorful vegetables.) Young went on to explain that the GI tract doesn't need to rest, and that unless someone is lactose intolerant or has celiac disease (in which eating gluten proteins sets off a dangerous inflammatory response), there's no point in 86-ing any one food. "It won't help you lose weight unless you end up eating fewer calories, whether you realize it or not," she added.

So I stopped the program and tried the less prohibitive approach in the best-selling book *The Virgin Diet* (Harlequin). Author JJ Virgin believes many health issues, including weight gain, may be caused by food intolerances. She suggests cutting seven common ones—gluten, dairy, soy, eggs, corn, peanuts, and sugar—for 21 days, then adding them back one by one to identify intolerances and adjust accordingly. She also allows coffee.

Although some experts don't agree with Virgin, there is research on her side. Sugar and starches trigger a hormonal response, which leads to inflammation that messes with the way the body uses energy and stores fat. And it's possible that for some people, even those without allergies, certain foods (gluten, dairy) set off an immune response and the production of antibodies, which prompts a process causing that nasty inflammation associated with weight gain.

The diet is more complicated than the 7 Foods thing, but I've been on it a week and lost 2 more pounds without feeling hungry or moody. Plus, I don't even *want* coffee; when the alarm goes off, I'm just weirdly wide-awake, which must be that "energy" everybody's talking about. Sure, more research on food intolerances needs to be done, but I won't roll my eyes if you eat some gluten-free crackers in the meantime. **mc**

GUT INSTINCT

In the diet world, a healthy, well-rested gastrointestinal tract is the latest must-have. But does eating cleaner actually work?

By JENNIFER GOLDSTEIN

LAST YEAR, I watched multiple friends cut gluten, dairy, sugar, or all of the above for days or weeks at a time. They did it to "improve gut health" and "have more energy," but it just seemed like a thinly veiled excuse to drop a few pounds. I had no urge to follow suit until this winter, when I got *really* friendly with sugar. So a few weeks ago, I decided I, too, needed "more energy."

I ordered East West Essentials' Optimal 7 Foods for 7 Days program, designed to kick-start weight loss, in part by giving my gastrointestinal (GI) tract a break from common food intolerances. For a week, I was to take the included supplements and eat just seven things: turkey, white fish, asparagus, quinoa, spinach, grapefruit, and Asian pears. The brochure suggested these