



This One Diet Cured My Chronic Yeast Infections and Cleared My Acne

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Two years ago, I was prescribed a strong antibiotic to treat a tooth infection. The meds put an end to my tooth pain, but two days after I finished the last pill, I developed some bizarre symptoms. My [skin](#) began to feel itchy and dry, I was constantly [bloated](#), and I had inexplicable brain fog.

I also started getting chronic vaginal [yeast infections](#). I'd treat each one with over-the-counter creams, and then just when I thought one was finally gone and my life was back to normal, the pain and itching would start again. I was miserable.

To try to heal my health issues, I spent months seeing countless doctors and sampling every suggested remedy under the sun—which included bathing in tea tree oil once a day and seeing a psychic. Then one day, I decided to check out a holistic medical center near my home in New York City. The center was run by Anthony Salzarulo, a holistic medical practitioner. Salzarulo diagnosed me with candidiasis, a fungal infection caused by an overgrowth of yeast.

Salzarulo had me start taking a daily [probiotic](#) available at drugstores, and he put me on a diet plan that he said would restore my immune system and balance the bacteria naturally found in my gut. So many medical doctors were unable to help me, so I gave his plan a try. It worked, and I feel better now than I ever did.

But a candidiasis diagnosis and diet plan are not without controversy. To find out more, I reached back out to Salzarulo and also spoke to two other experts for their takes.

What is candida overgrowth?

Candida is a type of yeast, and it's "a part of the natural biome," Salzarulo tells *Health*. Ordinarily, a person's body contains a healthy ratio of naturally occurring bacteria to yeast. But "when there's candida overgrowth, the microbiome is off and it needs to be brought back into balance," he says.

Antibiotic use is the most common factor that causes this overgrowth of candida or the bad bacteria, Salzarulo adds, because antibiotics kill off the good bacteria that keep

your system balanced. "Using antibiotics even once creates a very favorable situation for yeast to get the upper hand in your intestinal ecology," he explains.

Cynthia Sass, RD, *Health's* contributing nutrition editor, says that a weakened immune system and having a diet low in nutrients and high in sugar could also cause candida to grow. My love of candy, pasta, and pancakes, which are all loaded with sugar, worked hand in hand with the antibiotic to promote overgrowth by feeding the yeast in my body, she believes.

Sass points out that candidiasis is a contentious topic. "This is a controversial issue, even within the alternative medicine community," she tells *Health* via email.

"Practitioners who do believe in it however typically cite symptoms including chronic vaginal yeast infections or UTIs, fatigue, bloating, constipation, or diarrhea, brain fog, moodiness, and skin problems (itchiness, worsening of eczema or psoriasis)." But not all health professionals believe it's a legitimate diagnosis, and Sass says that no tests can prove that a person has candidiasis.

Another nutritionist I spoke to, Tamara Duker Freuman, RD, is also skeptical.

"Candidiasis is a real diagnosis, but it refers to candida overgrowth in the esophagus, in the vagina, and in the mouth; that's where candida overgrows," Freuman tells *Health*. But the idea "that you have this systemic sort of overgrowth . . . that is not real." While candida is a normal part of the flora in the gut, "when they say it's overgrowing, what are they basing it on? We have no standards for what is normal. We don't know what a normal amount is naturally found in the gut," she says.

The basics of the candida diet

Salzarulo does believe that candida overgrowth in the gut is a real thing, and he put me on a strict sugar-free, grain-free, and dairy-free diet to restore the right balance of yeast in my body. The goal is to starve the yeast by taking away the foods and beverages it could be feeding off of. That means no bread, pastries, pasta, chips, cereal, fried food, cheese, milk, starchy vegetables (like corn and potatoes), sugary desserts, fruit, soda, alcohol, or coffee.

That's a big list, but Salzarulo recommends focusing on what is allowed, not on the restrictions. Foods that are okay on the candida diet are green vegetables, meat, fish, eggs, salad, almonds, walnuts, herbal tea, green juice, and unsweetened coconut water. Along with the diet, he suggests taking vitamins and a probiotic, getting enough sleep, and avoiding stress, which all help boost your immune system.

There is no set amount of time to follow the diet; some people feel better after a month being on it, while others see their symptoms clear up after three months, Salzarulo says. However, once you do feel better and see symptoms disappear, you shouldn't immediately go back to eating Dunkin Donuts and pizza every day. Adds Sass: "After

resolving symptoms, foods that have been eliminated are systematically added back, but the goal is not to go back to a way of eating that triggers another imbalance."

What happened when I tried it

Telling someone who goes to IHOP once a week for the unlimited flapjack special that they can no longer have pancakes is like telling Kim Kardashian that she can't take selfies anymore. I was in tears when Salzarulo read me the list of foods I'd have to give up. The first few weeks were the most challenging. I was cranky, sleepy, hungry, and mad at the world. I dreamed of French fries.

It took about three weeks for my body to get used to my new meal plan. I would eat eggs for breakfast, baked chicken or fish and a side salad for lunch, a burger without the bun for dinner, and then snack on almonds and carrots throughout the day. I had some weak moments when I desperately craved Doritos (and maybe even snuck a few). But I had to keep reminding myself of the misery of my symptoms, and I had to stay strong in order to get my life and health back.

After a month, I started feeling better than I did even before my symptoms showed up. I wasn't hungry all the time, I was sleeping better, I had more energy than I had in years, and most importantly, the yeast infections stopped. To my surprise, I lost 15 pounds, my acne went away completely, and my hair and nails were longer and healthier.

"Typically the [candida diet] is much more nutrient-rich than the diet people had been consuming," Sass says. "That combined with eliminating sugar, coffee, and alcohol, and drinking more water, often does lead to other benefits, including increased energy, better digestive health, improved mood, mental clarity and sleep, improved skin health, and weight loss."

Two months later, I went back to Salzarulo, who gave me the green light to slowly add the foods I love back into my diet in moderation. I, of course, went to IHOP as soon as I left his office, but I found that I couldn't eat as much as I could before. I also realized that I didn't need sugar or French fries as much as I thought I did. I preferred eating salmon and salads over my usual choice of chicken fingers and fries—though I still enjoy them from time to time.

It's been almost two years, and I continue to monitor my sugar and carb intake and take a daily probiotic—though I am no longer on the candida diet, since my symptoms have not returned. Whether I really had candida overgrowth that was brought back into balance by the diet plan, or if the diet itself just happened to be healthier and that got rid of my symptoms, I may never know.

But looking back, I'm thrilled I didn't give in to my IHOP addiction early on. It's good to know that my desire to feel healthy beat out my cravings for unlimited pancakes.