HEALTH & WELLNESS

What Is The Scd Diet Food List

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Understanding the Specific Carbohydrate Diet and Its Core Principles

The Specific Carbohydrate Diet (SCD) is a therapeutic nutritional protocol designed primarily for individuals managing inflammatory bowel diseases such as Crohn’s disease, ulcerative colitis, celiac disease, and other digestive disorders. Developed by Dr. Sidney Haas and later popularized by Elaine Gottschall in her book *Breaking the Vicious Cycle*, the diet rests on a simple yet powerful premise: by restricting certain carbohydrates, you can starve harmful gut bacteria, reduce inflammation, and allow the intestinal lining to heal.

At the heart of the SCD lies a carefully curated **SCD diet food list**that distinguishes allowed foods from forbidden ones. Understanding what is the SCD diet food list requires grasping the science behind carbohydrate digestion. The diet permits only monosaccharides (single-molecule sugars) because they require no further breakdown and are easily absorbed in the small intestine. Disaccharides and polysaccharides, such as sucrose, lactose, and starches, are excluded because they feed bacteria that produce gas, toxins, and inflammation.

For anyone embarking on the SCD journey, knowing exactly which foods are allowed and which must be avoided is essential. This article provides a comprehensive, detailed breakdown of the SCD diet food list, along with practical tips for implementation.

What Is the SCD Diet Food List: The Complete Breakdown

The SCD diet food list is not just a random collection of healthy items; it is a scientifically grounded selection that supports gut healing. Below, we explore each major food category, highlighting what you can enjoy and what you must leave out.

Allowed Vegetables on the SCD Diet

Most vegetables are permitted on the SCD, with the exception of starchy varieties and those containing complex carbohydrates that are difficult to digest. Allowed vegetables are generally low in starch and high in nutrients.

- Leafy greens: Spinach, kale, Swiss chard, romaine lettuce, arugula
- Cruciferous vegetables: Broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, cabbage (in moderation, as some may cause gas initially)
- Squashes: Summer squash, zucchini, yellow squash, pumpkin (avoid winter squashes like butternut and acorn in early stages)
- Other low-starch options: Asparagus, green beans, celery, cucumber, bell peppers, eggplant, tomatoes, onions, garlic, mushrooms
- Sea vegetables: Kelp, nori, dulse (good for mineral intake)

Vegetables to avoid: Potatoes, sweet potatoes, yams, parsnips, corn, peas, and any canned vegetables with

added starches or sugars.

Fruits Permitted on the SCD

Fruits are allowed but only when fresh, frozen (without added sugar), or dried (without added sweeteners). The SCD diet food list emphasizes low-sugar fruits for healing, though most fruits are acceptable if fully ripe (ripe fruit has simpler sugars).

- Low-sugar fruits: Berries (blueberries, strawberries, raspberries, blackberries), cherries, plums, peaches, nectarines, apricots
- Moderate-sugar fruits: Apples (especially peeled and cooked), pears, grapes, mangoes, pineapples, bananas (very ripe, with brown spots)
- Fruits to avoid: Canned fruits in syrup, fruit juices with added sugar, dried fruits with added sugar (check labels), and unripe bananas (high in resistant starch)

Tip: Homemade applesauce (without sugar) is a healing staple of the SCD diet food list. It provides pectin, which can help soothe the gut.

Proteins: Meat, Poultry, Fish, and Eggs

All fresh, unprocessed meats are allowed on the SCD. The key is to avoid any meat that has been injected with broths, starches, or sugars. Protein is essential for repairing the intestinal lining.

- Allowed: Beef, lamb, pork, chicken, turkey, duck, game meats, fresh fish (salmon, cod, tuna, mackerel, sardines), shellfish (shrimp, crab, lobster, clams, mussels), eggs (from any source), and organ meats (liver, heart, kidney)
- To avoid: Processed meats like sausages, hot dogs, deli meats (unless you confirm no fillers, starches, or sugars), and any meat with added flavorings containing maltodextrin, dextrose, or modified food starch

Dairy: A Special Category

Dairy is controversial on the SCD. Because lactose is a disaccharide (milk sugar), most dairy products are forbidden. However, some dairy is allowed if the lactose has been broken down or removed.

- Allowed: Hard, aged cheeses (cheddar, Swiss, Gouda, Parmesan, which contain negligible lactose), homemade yogurt fermented for 24 hours (which consumes most of the lactose), butter (pure butterfat, no added milk solids), and ghee (clarified butter)
- To avoid: Milk, cream, soft cheeses (cottage cheese, ricotta, cream cheese), buttermilk, commercial yogurt (even plain, because fermentation is too short), ice cream, and any dairy with added thickeners or sugars

Important note: Some individuals with severe dairy sensitivities may need to avoid all dairy initially, then reintroduce hard cheeses and homemade yogurt slowly.

Nuts, Seeds, and Legumes

Nuts and seeds are generally allowed but should be consumed in moderation, especially at the beginning of the diet. They provide healthy fats and fiber.

- Allowed: Almonds, walnuts, pecans, macadamia nuts, brazil nuts, hazelnuts, pine nuts, cashews (in small amounts, as they are higher in carbs), sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, sesame seeds, flaxseeds, chia seeds
- Seed butters and flours: Almond butter, sunflower seed butter, homemade nut milks (strained)
- Legumes to avoid: All beans (kidney, black, pinto, chickpeas, lentils), soybeans, and peanuts (peanuts are legumes, not nuts, and are not allowed). However, green beans and snow peas (which are less mature legumes) are allowed.

Fats and Oils

Pure fats are an important energy source on the SCD diet food list. Stick to high-quality, unprocessed options.

- Allowed: Olive oil, coconut oil, avocado oil, lard, tallow, duck fat, chicken fat, bacon fat (from unsmoked, no-sugar bacon), and avocado (whole fruit)
- To avoid: Vegetable oils (soybean, canola, corn, sunflower, safflower), margarine, shortening, and any oil labeled with additives or preservatives

Herbs, Spices, and Condiments

Most herbs and spices are allowed, but you must check for hidden sugars, starches, and anti-caking agents.

- Allowed: All fresh and dried herbs (basil, oregano, thyme, rosemary, parsley, cilantro), spices (cinnamon, nutmeg, ginger, turmeric, cumin, coriander, paprika, black pepper, sea salt), pure vanilla extract (no sugar), mustard (made with allowed ingredients), vinegar (apple cider vinegar, white vinegar, balsamic vinegar – check for added sugar)
- To avoid: Any spice blends with anti-caking agents (silicon dioxide), commercial sauces (ketchup, BBQ sauce, teriyaki) that contain sugar or starch, soy sauce (contains wheat), and mayonnaise (usually has sugar or starch; can make homemade)

Beverages

Hydration is crucial, but many commercial beverages are off-limits.

- Allowed: Water (still or sparkling), herbal teas (peppermint, chamomile, rooibos), bone broth (homemade), fruit juice made from allowed fruits (diluted, and only in small amounts), coffee (black, though some people may need to limit it due to acidity)
- To avoid: Soda, fruit drinks, commercial juices with added sugar, alcohol (except dry wine in small amounts after healing), milk, and any beverage with artificial sweeteners

Foods to Strictly Avoid on the SCD Diet

To fully understand what is the SCD diet food list, you must also know what is not allowed. The following categories are completely prohibited because they contain complex carbohydrates that feed pathogenic gut bacteria.

- All grains: Wheat, rice, corn, oats, barley, rye, quinoa, millet, amaranth, buckwheat, and any flour made from them (including gluten-free flours like rice flour). This includes bread, pasta, cereal, crackers, and baked goods.
- All starches: Potatoes, sweet potatoes, yams, parsnips, tapioca, arrowroot, cornstarch, and any food with added starch (modified food starch, maltodextrin).
- All sugars except honey: White sugar, brown sugar, cane sugar, maple syrup, agave nectar, corn syrup, high-fructose corn syrup, dextrose, maltose, and any artificial sweeteners (aspartame, sucralose, stevia is often debated but generally avoided). The only sweetener allowed is raw honey (in moderation).
- All processed foods: Anything with preservatives, emulsifiers, thickeners, or artificial colors. Read every label carefully.
- All soy products: Tofu, tempeh, soy milk, edamame, soy sauce (contains wheat).
- Alcoholic beverages: Beer (contains gluten), spirits (often contain sugar), and sweet wines. Dry red or white wine may be introduced after significant healing.

Practical Tips for Following the SCD Diet Food List

Transitioning to the SCD can be challenging, but these strategies can help you stay on track while maximizing gut healing.

Start with the Intro Diet

Many SCD practitioners recommend a two-to-five-day intro diet consisting of only easily digestible foods: homemade chicken broth, gelatin (made from bone broth), cooked carrots, and allowed fruits like ripe bananas

and homemade applesauce. This helps calm acute inflammation before expanding the SCD diet food list.

Cook from Scratch

Since the SCD eliminates almost all processed foods, home cooking becomes essential. Batch-cook proteins, roast large trays of vegetables, and prepare homemade yogurt and broth weekly. Having SCD-compliant staples on hand prevents temptation.

Read Labels Vigilantly

Even foods that seem “natural” can contain hidden starches or sugars. Canned tomatoes, for instance, sometimes have added sugar or citric acid (which is usually fine, but check). Spice blends often use anti-caking agents that contain modified food starch. When in doubt, buy whole ingredients and season yourself.

Include Fermented Foods

Homemade SCD yogurt is a cornerstone of the diet because it provides beneficial bacteria that help rebalance the gut microbiome. If dairy is not tolerated, consider fermented vegetables like sauerkraut (made without sugar or vinegar).

Monitor Your Symptoms

Everyone responds differently. Some individuals find that certain allowed foods like eggs or nuts cause discomfort in the early stages. The SCD diet food list is a guide, but personalization is key. Keep a food diary to identify your triggers.

Sample Day on the SCD Diet

To give you a concrete idea of how the SCD diet food list translates into real meals, here is a sample menu:

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