

# Treatment of Active Crohn's Disease by Exclusion Diet: East Anglian Multicentre Controlled Trial

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The management of Crohn's disease (CD) is unsatisfactory. Many of the drugs used are not always effective or have serious side effects. Elemental diets can be as effective as steroids in inducing remission in acute CD, however patients often relapse when they recommence a normal diet. In this study, the use of an elemental diet in acute CD and the efficacy of dietary modification or oral corticosteroids in maintaining remission achieved by an elemental diet were examined.

In a multicentre trial, 136 patients with active CD were initially given an elemental diet and all other CD treatment was discontinued, 43 patients (31%) chose not to take the elemental diet for longer than 7 days. Following 14 days on an elemental diet, 78 (84%) of the remaining 93 patients achieved remission. Patients also showed a significant improvement in erythrocyte sedimentation rate, serum albumin and C-reactive protein. These 78 patients were then randomly allocated to the diet (n=40) or prednisolone (n=38, 40 mg/d). Prednisolone was tapered gradually, provided remission was maintained; prednisolone was withdrawn after 3 months. This group also received general advice on health eating. The diet group was given 'tapered' placebo for 3 months plus advice on the introduction of one new food daily with the exclusion of any food that provoked symptoms. Physicians unaware of the treatment groups evaluated patients for up to 2 years.

Intention-to-treat analysis showed a median remission of 3.8 (interquartile range 5.0) months in the prednisolone group and 7.5 (15.3) months in the diet group, with relapse rates at 2 yr of 79 and 62%, respectively (p=0.048). In the diet group, a number of food intolerances were identified, mainly cereals, milk, tea, yeast, coffee, egg and potatoes. Twenty-six patients were intolerant of more than 3 foods.

This study confirms the value of an elemental diet as an effective treatment for acute Crohn's disease. Food testing on reintroduction of a normal diet may provide a long-term strategy for management of Crohn's disease.

## Key Points

- 84% of compliant patients achieved remission
- Just 14 days on the elemental diet was required to achieve remission
- Time in remission was twice the length for patients on the food reintroduction diet compared to patients taking prednisolone.
- This multicentre study included district general hospitals as well as specialist centres.