

A Practical Insight into The Elemental Diet with Danielle Elliott, ND



Can you please tell me a little bit about your practice? What do you specialise in?

I run Tummy Rescue and probably 95% of my patients come to see me for any number of gut issues from an IBS (irritable bowel syndrome) presentation, to SIBO (small intestinal bacterial overgrowth), Coeliac Disease and IBD (inflammatory bowel disease). But then I can also see patients with Endometriosis (due to the gut connection), blood pressure or even migraines. I have been in practice for 18 years and specialised in gut health 13 years ago.

I also help patients through my membership, Tummy Rescue Hub which I launched last year, so that's a much newer side of my business.

How often would you recommend an elemental diet?

I probably use this type of diet every couple of months with patients. It is not my first go-to, but in some cases it is essential for getting results. I have also used an elemental diet at home with my husband for his Crohn's disease during the worst flare-ups.

What would you recommend an elemental diet for?

So as mentioned above I use it for patients experiencing an IBD flare-up, to give their gut a "rest". I also use it as part of SIBO treatment protocols, in which I can implement it as the sole strategy or introduce a half elemental diet and have the patient eat a SIBO-friendly dinner. I also use elemental diet in addition to regular food intake for a variety of patients, including those who just can't get enough calories and continue to lose weight and can't afford to.

What drew you to an elemental diet as part of your possible protocol for these conditions?

I first learnt about it from Dr. Nirala Jacobi, while completing her SIBO Mastery Course, but back then we could only recommend a homemade recipe for it. Then I attended a seminar presented by Dr. Morello who offered other possibilities and changed the way I approached it.

Can you outline a case study in which you incorporated an elemental diet successfully?

I had a 30-year-old female present with nausea, bloating, reactions to foods and constipation, all of which she scored a 10/10. She had already trialled a low FODMAP diet with a dietician and did not get much relief.

We then received a positive LBT (lactulose breath test) for both hydrogen and methane. We began with supporting improved bowel motions and improving gut integrity. We completed 8 weeks of antimicrobials and she had no great improvement. So we decided together to use an elemental diet. She was very keen to complete a full elemental diet. After 2 days, she felt she couldn't continue, so we switched tactics and went to a half elemental diet. She used clear broths/soups for 1 week as her meals and then moved to slow-cooked/soft meals for dinner that stuck to the SIBO Bi-phasic Diet principles. 2 weeks later she was feeling the best she had in years. She was at least 90% better, so we moved on with further work. It was 3 years before she needed to see me again for SIBO symptoms.

What were the challenges you faced when implementing an elemental diet? Did you have issues with compliance? How did you overcome this?

The biggest thing I explain to patients when using this type of diet as the sole strategy in something like SIBO for 2-3 weeks, is the mental/emotional aspect of not eating anything. So, I find not many people can complete a full elemental diet for this amount of time. I discuss this with them and explain what might be the difficult aspects. A strategy I put in place from the start is as follows: I suggest they try the diet for 1-2 full days to test the water, then from there, we can have a chat about whether a half elemental or a full elemental diet is for them.

In what situations would you recommend a half elemental diet vs a full elemental diet?

As discussed above the test days helps me determine that, if the patient is either unsure or if they say they are determined to do a full elemental diet, we can try it based on that. However, I find a lot of people think they can do it, but in reality and everyday life, especially when they are cooking for the family, a half elemental diet is much easier. They can always start with a full elemental diet and then change if needed, as in my case above. I also would not consider a full elemental diet in someone who cannot afford to lose more weight.

Do you have anything more you would like to share with us?

I think being prepared to use an elemental diet in different ways and even changing that during treatment, like my case example above (and not giving up), can yield amazing results.