



The Anti-Inflammatory Diet

Inflammation is one of the body's natural ways of protecting itself. It includes many chemical reactions that help to fight off infections, to increase blood flow to places that need healing, and to generate pain as a signal that something is wrong with the body. Unfortunately, as with any process in the body, it is possible to have too much of a good thing. A number of medical conditions are linked to too much inflammation in the body. Some of these include:

- Alzheimer's disease
- Asthma
- Cancer
- Chronic obstructive lung diseases (emphysema and bronchitis)
- Chronic pain
- Type 2 diabetes
- Heart disease
- Inflammatory bowel disease (Crohn's or ulcerative colitis)
- Stroke
- Diseases where the immune system attacks the body, such as rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, or scleroderma

Often, people take medications to decrease inflammation. Drugs like ibuprofen and aspirin can change the body's chemical reactions, but they are not without side effects. Research has shown that other things can decrease inflammation too. Many things we have control over, such as our stress levels, how much we exercise, and how we eat will influence how much inflammation we have in our bodies.

How we eat can affect inflammation, and certain diets are more likely to decrease pain and other symptoms of disease. Many studies have shown that people who eat certain types of food are less likely to have the health problems listed at the left. Some important guidelines for people who want to eat an anti-inflammatory diet are:

1. **Avoid unhealthy fats.** Trans-fats and fats that are high in omega-6 fatty acids cause inflammation. These fats are found in many animal products and in any foods designed to have a long shelf life. Mono-unsaturated fats, like olive oil, are better choices. Omega-3 fats, like fish oil and flax oil, are especially good for decreasing inflammation.
2. **Eat fruits and vegetables.** Many studies are showing that a diet high in fruits and vegetables is good for decreasing inflammation. The more servings eaten, the better. Eight to 10 servings per day is a good goal.
3. **Eat fiber.** Diets high in fiber are shown to help to decrease inflammation. A good goal is about 30 grams a day, ideally from a diet rich in whole grains, fruits, and vegetables.

(See table on next page.)

The information in this handout is for general education. Please work with your health care practitioner to use this information in the best way possible to promote your health.

LOCATIONS

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The following is an overall list of foods that affect inflammation:

Eat More	Avoid Eating
<p>↑ Foods high in omega-3 fats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cold water fish (salmon, sardines, herring, mackerel)• Ground flax seeds or flax oil• Leafy green vegetables• Walnuts <p>↑ Foods high in antioxidants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Yellow, orange, and red vegetables (peppers, carrots)• Dark leafy greens (spinach, Romaine lettuce)• Citrus fruits• Black and green teas• Allium vegetables (onions, garlic) <p>↑ Foods high in fiber</p> <p>↑ Spices that contain anti-inflammatory compounds</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ginger• Rosemary• Turmeric• Oregano• Cayenne• Clove• Nutmeg <p>↑ Herbs that have anti-inflammatory properties</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Boswellia• Feverfew• Willow bark	<p>↓ Foods high in trans- and omega-6 fats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Red meats• Dairy products• Partially hydrogenated oils• Corn, cottonseed, grapeseed, peanut, safflower, soy, and sunflower oils• Foods with a long shelf life (chips, crackers) <p>↓ Foods high in simple carbohydrates (That is, foods with a high glycemic load. Foods that cause rapid rises and drops in insulin levels seem to cause more inflammation.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• White breads or bagels• English muffins• Instant rice• Rice and corn cereals <p>↓ Foods more likely to trigger intolerance reactions (these vary from person to person)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dairy• Wheat• Eggs• Artificial flavors and colors

This handout was created by Lynda Wargolet, health psychology therapist at Northshore Integrative Healthcare, Libertyville, Illinois. Content adapted from information written by Rakel, D. & Rindfleisch, A. (2005). *Inflammation: Nutritional, Botanical, and Mind-Body Influences. Southern Medical Journal. 98, 302-10.*

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