

Anti-Inflammatory Diet 101 – Fight Inflammation Naturally

Inflammation is a natural process that helps your body heal and defend itself from harm.

Unfortunately, it can sometimes run wild and become chronic.

Chronic inflammation can last for a long time — weeks, months or years — and may lead to various health problems.

On the bright side, there are many things you can do to reduce inflammation and improve your overall health.

This article outlines a detailed plan for an anti-inflammatory diet and lifestyle.

What is Inflammation?

[Inflammation](#) is your body's way to protect itself from infection, illness or injury.

As part of the inflammatory response, your body increases production of white blood cells, immune cells and substances called [cytokines](#) that help fight infection.

Classic signs of acute (short-term) inflammation include redness, pain, heat and swelling.

On the other hand, chronic (long-term) inflammation is often silent, and occurs inside the body without any noticeable symptoms.

This type of inflammation can drive conditions like diabetes, heart disease, fatty liver disease and cancer.

Chronic inflammation can also happen when people are obese or under stress.

When doctors look for inflammation, they test for a few markers in the blood, including [C-reactive protein \(CRP\)](#), [homocysteine](#), [TNF alpha](#) and [IL-6](#).

An Unhealthy Lifestyle Can Drive Inflammation

Certain lifestyle factors can promote inflammation, especially when they occur on a regular basis.

Consuming high amounts of [sugar](#) and [high-fructose corn syrup](#) is particularly bad. It can lead to [insulin resistance](#), diabetes and obesity.

Consuming [refined carbs](#), such as white bread, can also contribute to inflammation, insulin resistance and obesity.

Eating [processed and packaged foods](#) that contain [trans fats](#) has also been shown to promote inflammation and damage the [endothelial cells](#) that line your arteries.

[Vegetable oils](#) used in many kinds of processed foods are another culprit. Consuming them regularly results in an imbalance of [omega-6 to omega-3 fatty acids](#), which leads to inflammation.

Excessive intake of [alcohol](#) and [processed meat](#) can also have inflammatory effects on the body.

An inactive lifestyle that includes a lot of [sitting](#) is a major non-dietary factor that can also promote inflammation.

How to Reduce Inflammation with Your Diet

If you want to reduce inflammation, eat less [inflammatory foods](#) and more [anti-inflammatory foods](#).

Base your diet on whole, nutrient-dense foods that contain [antioxidants](#), and avoid processed products.

Antioxidants work by reducing levels of free radicals. These reactive molecules are created as a natural part of your metabolism, but can lead to inflammation when they're not held in check.

Your anti-inflammatory diet should provide a healthy balance of [protein](#), [carbs](#) and fat at each meal. Make sure you also meet your body's needs for vitamins, minerals, [fiber](#) and [water](#).

One diet considered anti-inflammatory is the [Mediterranean diet](#), which has been shown to reduce inflammatory markers such as CRP and IL-6.

A [low-carb diet](#) also reduces inflammation, particularly for people who are obese or have metabolic syndrome.

Vegetarian diets have also been shown to help reduce inflammation.

Foods to Avoid

Some foods are notorious for promoting inflammation.

Consider minimizing or cutting these out completely:

- **Sugary beverages:** [Sugar-sweetened drinks](#) and [fruit juices](#).
- **Refined carbs:** White bread, white pasta, etc.
- **Desserts:** Cookies, candy, cake and ice cream.
- **Processed meat:** Hot dogs, bologna, sausages, etc.
- **Processed snack foods:** Crackers, chips and pretzels.
- **Certain oils:** Processed seed- and vegetable oils like [soybean](#) and [corn](#) oil.
- **Trans fats:** Foods with "partially hydrogenated" in the ingredients list.
- **Alcohol:** Excessive alcohol consumption.

Foods to Eat

Include plenty of these anti-inflammatory foods:

- **Vegetables:** [Broccoli](#), [kale](#), Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, etc.
- **Fruit:** Especially deeply colored berries like grapes and cherries.
- **High-fat fruits:** [Avocados](#) and [olives](#).
- **Healthy fats:** [Olive oil](#) and [coconut oil](#).
- **Fatty fish:** [Salmon](#), sardines, herring, mackerel and anchovies.
- **Nuts:** [Almonds](#) and other nuts.
- **Peppers:** [Bell peppers](#) and [chili peppers](#).
- **Chocolate:** [Dark chocolate](#).
- **Spices:** Such as [turmeric](#), fenugreek and [cinnamon](#).
- **Tea:** [Green tea](#).
- **Red wine:** Up to 5 oz. (140 ml) of [red wine](#) per day for women, and 10 oz (280 ml) per day for men.

Sample Menu for an Anti-Inflammatory Diet

It's easier to stick to a diet when you have a plan. Here's a great sample menu to start from, featuring a day of anti-inflammatory meals:

Breakfast

- 3-egg omelet with 1 cup mushrooms and 1 cup kale, cooked in coconut oil.
- 1 cup cherries.
- Green tea and/or water.

Lunch

- Grilled salmon on a bed of mixed greens with olive oil and vinegar.
- 1 cup raspberries, topped with plain Greek [yogurt](#) and chopped pecans.
- Iced tea, water.

Snack

- Bell pepper strips with guacamole.

Dinner

- [Chicken](#) curry with [sweet potatoes](#), cauliflower and broccoli.
- Red wine (5–10 oz. or 140–280 g).
- Dark chocolate (preferably at least 80% cocoa).

Other Tips to Reduce Inflammation

Once you have your healthy menu organized, make sure you incorporate these other good habits of an anti-inflammatory lifestyle:

- **Supplements:** [Certain supplements](#) can boost the anti-inflammatory effects of foods, including fish oil and curcumin.
- **Regular exercise:** Exercise can decrease inflammatory markers and the risk of chronic disease.
- **Sleep:** Getting [enough sleep](#) is extremely important. Researchers have found that a poor night's sleep increases inflammation.

The Rewards of an Anti-Inflammatory Lifestyle

An anti-inflammatory diet, along with exercise and good sleep, may provide many benefits:

- Improvement to symptoms of arthritis, inflammatory bowel syndrome, lupus and other autoimmune disorders.
- Decreased risk of obesity, heart disease, diabetes, depression, cancer and other diseases.
- Reduction in inflammatory markers in the blood.
- Better blood sugar, cholesterol and [triglyceride](#) levels.
- Improvement in energy and mood.