

Healthy Living

Patient Information from the American Chiropractic Association

The Anti-Inflammatory Diet

Health professionals are focusing increasing attention on inflammation and the “anti-inflammatory diet.” Before we look at what goes into that diet—and why anyone would follow it—we need to know what “inflammation” is.

What is the inflammatory process?

Inflammation can be good or bad. When it’s good, it’s a natural response by the body to cutting ourselves, for example. The immune system sends white blood cells and other substances to the site of the injury to get the healing process going.

Not all injuries to the body are as obvious as a cut finger, though. Stress can contribute to chronic inflammation, as well as a sedentary lifestyle. Our genes can increase the likelihood of chronic inflammation. So can exposure to a variety of toxins, including secondhand tobacco smoke. A wide variety of causes can bring about chronic—and invisible—inflammation.

Why should we be concerned?

A low-grade chronic inflammation damages blood vessels, which increases the likelihood of heart problems and auto-immune illnesses like lupus or rheumatoid arthritis. It has also been implicated in the development of certain cancers, in diabetes, and in stroke. Inflammation-related conditions include Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s disease, as well as other age-related disorders.

Learning how specific foods influence the inflammatory process is the best strategy for containing inflammation and reducing long-term disease risks.

Testing for inflammation

A substance known as C-reactive protein (CRP) is produced by the liver. When inflammation is going on, the level of CRP becomes elevated. Doctors can measure the level of general inflammation by using a blood test, the hs-CRP (high-sensitivity C-reactive protein) test.



Treatment and prevention of inflammation through diet

The anti-inflammatory diet is not a cure-all, but it is among the best choices we can make—a scientifically proven way of maintaining optimum health. One of the major plusses of going on such a diet is that it provides us with steady energy and the necessary vitamins, minerals, essential fatty acids, dietary fiber and protective phytonutrients.

It is not designed as a short-term diet, nor as a weight-loss regimen, but as a dietary lifestyle. It’s a major shift away from grabbing a slice of pizza, a Twinkie and a soda and calling that “lunch.” By choosing to follow an anti-inflammatory diet, we are making a conscious choice in favor of feeling better now and in the future.

What contributes to inflammation?

The first step toward leading an anti-inflammatory life is knowing what kinds of foods are likely to make us sick (or sicker). Our culture puts a high priority on convenience. We want foods, for example, that are fast and easy—preferably packaged, and not cooked

by us. The quickie foods we turn to as fuel to keep us alert through long days of work or play are major culprits in the spread of invisible inflammation.

What contributes to health?

The anti-inflammatory diet is easy to remember and follow. Lots of fresh fruits and vegetables are its foundation. It includes three to five half-cup servings of whole and cracked grains, one to two half-cup servings of beans and legumes, and five to seven teaspoons of healthy fats each day. Cooked brown rice is easy to make and healthful, while bread should be kept to a minimum because it is processed. The daily allotment of good protein and omega 3 fatty acids can be found in two to six four-ounce servings of wild Alaskan salmon, herring and sardines.

Other sources of protein are not recommended for daily consumption. These include omega-3 enriched eggs, natural cheese, other dairy products, and poultry or other skinless meats—they can be consumed three to five times a week.

Beverages concentrate on water and tea. Two to four cups of white, green, or oolong teas a day are suggested. A glass or two of organic red wine per day is acceptable. For sweets, dark chocolate, sorbet, and unsweetened dried fruits are recommended—but white sugar is not.

Recipes available

The anti-inflammatory diet includes such a wide variety of possible ingredients that a shift in that direction should not leave anyone feeling hungry or deprived. A quick Google search will turn up many simple anti-inflammatory recipes that should appeal to most people's tastes and culinary preferences. Check them out. ■

Quick Tips

- Avoid white sugar and white flour.
- Try to include carbohydrates, fat, and protein at each meal.
- Read labels in the grocery store—avoid anything that is “hydrogenated” or even “partially hydrogenated.”
- Keep saturated fats found in butter, cream, high-fat cheese, unskinned chicken and fatty meats to a bare minimum.
- Extra virgin olive oil should be your main cooking oil.
- Small amounts of avocados and nuts are good—especially walnuts, cashews, almonds, and nut butters.
- Decrease consumption of animal protein except for fish and moderate quantities of high-quality natural cheese and yogurt.
- Experiment with vegetable protein, especially from beans.
- Remember your fiber. Fruits (especially berries), vegetables (especially beans) and whole grains are rich in fiber.
- Fruits and vegetables should reflect all colors of the rainbow—and should especially include berries, tomatoes, orange and yellow fruits, and dark leafy greens. Together with mushrooms, these provide a healthy dose of your daily required phytonutrients.



For more information on prevention and wellness, or to find a doctor of chiropractic near you, go to the Patient Information section on ACA's Web site at www.acatoday.org or call 800-986-4636.

Carol Marleigh Kline, Writer