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It's About Eating Right

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Inflammation and Diet

By Marisa Moore, MBA, RDN, LD

Inflammation is a protective process you are probably more familiar with than you think. It's the body's method of healing itself in response to an injury or exposure to a harmful substance. This is useful when, for example, skin is healing from a cut; however, inflammation is not always beneficial.

Chronic (or ongoing) inflammation occurs when the immune system attacks the body's healthy cells leading to autoimmune diseases like rheumatoid arthritis, states of immune deficiency like Crohn's disease or skin conditions like psoriasis. Underlying chronic inflammation also may play a role in heart disease, diabetes and Alzheimer's disease.

Evidence supporting the impact of specific foods on inflammation in the body is limited. We know that some foods have the capacity to suppress inflammation, but it's unclear how often and how much is needed for this benefit. Though there's promising research for the impact of foods like fatty fish, berries and tart cherry juice, beware of anything touted as an anti-inflammatory miracle.

"Current science advocates overall good nutrition to help enhance the body's immune system and provide antioxidants to reduce inflammatory stress," explains Cheryl Orlansky, registered dietitian nutritionist and certified diabetes educator.

"Healthy fats, such as omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids, reduce inflammation and help regulate membrane function," says Orlansky. These types of fats should be included in a healthy diet. "Remove those fats that turn on inflammatory processes, such as saturated fat from meats, butter, cream sauces, fried foods and trans fat found in many processed foods," Orlansky says.

That's the way to go versus focusing on one specific "superfood."

Eating to Reduce Inflammation

Luckily, eating with reduced inflammation in mind may be easier than you think.


- Let fruits and vegetables make up at least half your plate at meals. Take care to regularly fit in fresh, frozen or dried berries and cherries. Be sure to eat a variety of vegetables, including leafy greens like kale, chard and Brussels sprouts.
- Opt for plant-based sources of protein like beans, nuts and seeds.
- Choose whole grains instead of refined ones. Swap brown, black or wild rice for white rice; whole oats or barley for cream of wheat; and whole-wheat bread instead of white.
- Swap heart-healthy fats for not so healthy ones. Olive oil, avocados, nuts and seeds are a few delicious choices.
- Choose fatty fish like salmon, sardines and anchovies to get a heart-healthy dose of omega-3 fatty acids.
- Season your meals with fresh herbs and spices. They pack a flavorful and antioxidant-rich punch.





Though diet is important, it's not the only factor. Quality and duration of sleep and other lifestyle factors can have a direct impact on inflammation.

Overall, to avoid issues with chronic inflammation, make it your mission to achieve a healthy diet, maintain a healthy weight, get adequate sleep and engage in regular physical activity.

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