

Anti-Inflammatory Diet

For allergies, joint pain, heart disease prevention, and fibromyalgia

The healthiest diet is built around fresh organic fruits and vegetables. Colorful fruits and vegetables like berries, plums, peaches, oranges, red and purple grapes, cherries, kale, spinach, peppers and peas are the healthiest. Paler colored foods are OK but not as desirable. Melons, celery, cucumbers, white grapes, bananas and pineapple contain more water and sugar and less anti-inflammatory nutrients but are better than processed snack foods like chips or cookies.

Limit red meat to two or three meals per week and try to find grass-fed or free-range. Eat deep cold-water ocean fish at least twice per week. Canned tuna packed in water counts as fish. Avoid tuna packed in oil and avoid farm-raised fish unless it is certified high Omega 3. Nuts are a good protein source as long as there are no allergies. Raw walnuts, almonds and pecans are a good source of protein and healthy oils. Peanuts or other roasted nuts are too high in Omega 6 fatty acids and can be an occasional snack but not a regular component of the diet. Beans are an excellent protein and fiber source but must be well cooked and eaten in moderation.

Vegetable oils like corn and soybean oil are highly inflammatory because of the high Omega 6 fatty acid content. Coconut oil, olive oil and grass-fed butter are less inflammatory. Remember Omega 3 reduces inflammation. Omega 6 increases inflammation and the typical American diet is heavily skewed to excess Omega 6 fatty acids.

Eat no more than your body can properly digest at each meal. Food that passes into the lower bowel undigested can cause an increased growth of micro-organisms in bowel that produce inflammation inducing toxins. An easy rule of thumb is that the effective digestive capacity of the stomach is about the amount of food that you can hold in two hands cupped together. Avoid eating fruit with meals because it digests at a different rate than other foods and can cause digestive problems and inflammation in the gut. Eat fruit at least a half-hour before a meal or at least two hours after.

In general a diet that is too high in carbohydrates will tend to cause weight gain and oxidative stress on the body. Limit carbohydrate intake to around 200 grams per day. Reduce that to 150 grams if you are having acute inflammatory symptoms and 100 grams per day if you are in the obese or borderline category for body mass index.

Drink six to eight glasses of pure water per day. If you find that you are hungry between meals it is often a sign that you are water deficient, not food deficient. We can live for weeks without food but only a few days without water. If you feel hungry between meals drink a glass of water and if you are still hungry ten minutes later have a snack but try the water first. Avoid excess fruit juice because of the high sugar content. Avoid carbonated beverage for many reasons.

An anti-inflammatory diet can be easily created by following these general guidelines for each meal:

Breakfast: Chose between these combinations: Nuts and fresh fruit **or** grass fed yogurt and fresh fruit **or** free range eggs and sautéed vegetables (peppers, mushrooms, onions) **or** grass-fed, low-fat cottage cheese and fresh fruit.

Lunch: Mixed green salad with carrots, celery, tomatoes and red pepper. Add a protein source like tuna, cheese, lean meat, nuts or beans. Top with a homemade anti-inflammatory salad dressing by mixing 6 parts V8 juice, 3 parts fruit juice and 1 part balsamic vinegar.

Dinner: Imagine that your dinner plate is divided in half. One full half should be filled with vegetables like greens, green beans, peas, broccoli, squash, zucchini, spaghetti squash or cabbage. The other half of the plate should be divided again

so that one fourth of the plate is dedicated to some sort of protein such as free range chicken breast, grass fed beef, tofu, tempeh, eggs or some other high quality protein source. The remaining fourth would be your starch such as sweet potato, beets, turnips, carrots or similar root vegetable.

Snacks: Drink a glass of water before reaching for food but if you really need a snack between meals reach for fruit and/or nuts. Beware of fried snack foods, candy, baked goods and granola bars which are very high in sugar, inflammatory oils and just make you more hungry ten minutes later. I have found a couple of meal bars on the market that I like. The one I like the best is called Good Greens which contains a wide variety of fruits and vegetables. They are available online and locally at most grocery and health food stores. Their website even says that the Duchess convenience stores carry them.

Some people have allergies or sensitivities to a particular food or food group that cause chronic inflammation. Here are the most common ones to be aware of.

Sugar is known to increase joint and muscle pain in certain individuals.

Wheat products are a common problem so it is best to start by avoiding any wheat products for a week to see if there is any improvement. Some people may need to limit **corn** as it is a common allergen too. **Grains** in general contain high levels of Omega 6 fatty acids and sugars and therefore contribute to inflammation and cause chronic pain, autoimmune conditions, chronic inflammatory conditions such as allergies, joint pain, gastritis and inflammatory bowel disease, dementia, glaucoma and circulatory disease. Replace grains with root vegetables such as yams, beets, carrots and turnips as much as possible because of the healthier fatty acid balance and the anti-oxidants in brightly colored foods.

Chocolate sometimes causes swelling and joint pain in some people that can be confused with rheumatoid arthritis.

The **nightshade** vegetable family can cause severe joint pain and swelling in susceptible individuals. Nightshade vegetables include potatoes, tomatoes, peppers, eggplants and paprika.

Some people are allergic to foods containing **latex**. Bananas, kiwi, avocado, chestnuts and papaya contain relatively high levels of latex.

The most recently discovered category of food sensitivity is related to **histamine**. Histamine is a chemical that is involved in the natural immune response when white blood cells move to an area of tissue damage. One particular type of immune cell is called a mast cell. You can think of these as microscopic depth charges that explode upon contact with a bacteria or virus. When they explode they release different kinds of chemicals that can destroy the invading bug. One of those chemicals is histamine. These chemicals also act as homing beacons for other white blood cells that follow the “scent” of inflammation to the area of damage and continue the attack. The severity of the response depends to a degree on how prone the mast cells are to rupturing and spilling their chemical payload. The propensity for a mast cell to rupture is related to nutrition, including the presence of an anti-oxidant called quercetin. Dietary sources of quercetin are mostly dark colored fruits and vegetable like blueberries, cherries, broccoli and kale. If you find that your symptoms get better with anti-histamine drugs, you likely could benefit from increasing your intake of the quercetin rich foods or even taking a quercetin supplement. You might also consider avoiding foods that contain high levels of histamine until you get your nutritional levels up. Just do a Google search for “histamine foods” for a list of foods to avoid.

If you suspect a food allergy or sensitivity start with one of these food groups and try to go a week without eating anything from that group to see if symptoms decrease. If symptoms decrease but not enough to be sure then test it by gorging on these foods for three days to see if the symptoms return. Then try the next food group on the list. Don't be discouraged by the changes to your diet that these recommendations suggest. You will begin to feel better almost immediately and the closer you adhere to the plan the better you will feel. Eating better will be rewarded by feeling better and that will make it easy to stick to the plan. If you have any questions or suggestions please let me know.