



INFLAMMATION

What is chronic inflammation?

Inflammation is an essential process that protects your body in case of injury or infection, but when it becomes chronic, lingering for months or years, it releases cells or chemicals that can damage healthy tissues. Inflammation can also undermine your ability to respond to infections. Some of the signs that you have chronic inflammation include lack of energy, depression or anxiety, joint/muscle pain, gut issues, brain fog. The symptoms can be mild and you may not realise that you have low grade chronic inflammation in your body.

Chronic inflammation has been linked to conditions like heart disease, cancer, diabetes and cognitive decline. It's not yet clear if inflammation is a direct cause of these conditions or if there are other factors at play. This means that we don't know for certain if reducing inflammation through diet is going to reduce the risk of these diseases. What we know is that eating whole food based diet helps reduce inflammation which in turn can have a positive impact on your health.

Inflammation and ageing: with ageing the body is less able to respond effectively to threats, so the immune system is constantly activated, leading to low grade chronic inflammation.

This is not a guide for healthy eating, it's written specifically for people who have decided they want to eat a less inflammatory diet. **Focus on adding delicious anti inflammatory foods**, as it's far more successful and sustainable than restricting your diet. If you are not in a position to change the way you eat right now, there are other things you can do to improve your general wellbeing and reduce inflammation, restricting your diet can have the opposite effect if it causes anxiety and stress around food. .

What can help reduce inflammation?

- **Giving up smoking:** smoking causes damage to your airways and activates inflammation in the body.
- **Exercise:** exercise helps to fight many of the conditions linked to inflammation, so it's important to be as active as your health allows you. Any type of exercise is good as long as it is done regularly.
- **Reduce stress:** stress is linked to an increase in inflammatory substances in the body. Try activities that help you reduce stress like a relaxing hobby, practicing yoga, breathing or mindfulness.
- **Alcohol:** a daily glass of wine may lower inflammation but excessive drinking has the opposite effect.
- **A note on visceral fat:** concentration of fat in the abdomen is a risk factor, regardless of your weight, because some fat tissue produces inflammatory chemicals. This fat can be reduced through weight loss, but research shows that 90% of people are not able to achieve long term weight loss. Changes to your lifestyle and diet are beneficial regardless of your weight.





What foods are linked to inflammation? (but you can still eat....)

- **Foods high in saturated fats:** e.g. fatty meat, butter, palm oil. Some foods high in saturated fats, such as yoghurt, cheese and coconut oil, are believed to have properties that may limit or offset the inflammatory effect.
- **Trans fats:** these are the worst type of fat. They are banned in a small number of countries and US states, but not in the UK (however their usage has significantly reduced in recent years). They are used mainly in processed foods and hard margarine, check the label for 'partially hydrogenated' fats or oils.
- **Foods high in refined sugars:** sugar-sweetened soda and drinks, cookies, cakes etc.
- **Red meat:** there is considerable evidence linking red meat to inflammation and cancer (although some argue that good quality organic meat from grass fed animals is not pro-inflammatory, but research studies don't make this distinction).
- **Processed meat:** e.g. sausages, ham, bacon, cold meats. There is good evidence that these foods, if eaten regularly, are linked to diseases such as cancer and heart disease.
- **Refined carbohydrates (as your main source of carbs):** white bread, white flour, white rice. They are fine eaten in moderation within a diet rich in whole grains.
- **Fried foods:** cooking foods at high temperatures produces inflammatory compounds.
- **Ultra-processed foods:** they are foods that undergo multiple processing and contain ingredients that have already been processed. Look out for artificial colourings and flavouring, mono and diglycerides of fatty acids (as they can contain trans fats), but also any ingredients that you don't recognise as food. More and more evidence is coming out about the negative effects on our health.
- **What about dairy and gluten?** these foods can have an inflammatory effect if you are sensitive to them. You don't need to eliminate them unless you react to them.

Moderate amounts of these foods are not likely to be a problem, focus on eating plenty of wholefoods such as fruit, vegetables and whole grains. Your diet doesn't need to be perfect to be healthy, and no food should be 'off limit'!

What foods are anti-inflammatory?

- **Fatty fish:** sardines, anchovies, mackerel, salmon, kippers, herrings.
- **Food high in fibre:** all fruit, vegetables and whole grains.
- **Nuts**
- **Probiotics:** e.g. fermented foods such as live kimchee and sauerkraut, kefir and yoghurt. Choose products without added sugar/artificial ingredients, which may negate the anti inflammatory benefit.
- **Spices and herbs:** including garlic, onion, ginger, saffron, pepper, thyme, oregano and rosemary.
- **Tea:** black tea and green tea, in moderation.





- **Fruit and veg:** most brightly coloured fruit and veg, green leafy veg (spinach, kale, greens, broccoli). Onions and tomatoes. Berries, grapes, plums and cherries. Don't focus on specific fruit and vegetables, make sure you eat a variety of fruit and vegetables (as wholefoods). Juices and smoothies may be a useful addition to increase your intake of certain nutrients.
- **Oils:** olive oil, walnut oil, flaxseed, canola/rapeseed oil.

The levels of anti-inflammatory compounds vary according to growing conditions and storage. This means choosing food that is fresh, local, and/or organic, but it's not always possible. Frozen fruit and vegetables, unprocessed tinned food (whole, without added ingredients) are also good choices. Eat the best quality you can afford, what matters is that you eat delicious wholefoods.

Anti-inflammatory diets

To practice "anti-inflammatory eating" it's best to focus on your overall diet. You don't need to follow a specific diet to improve your health (some can even have the opposite effect). However it may be useful to know that the following have been found to have anti-inflammatory properties:

- **VEGAN:** if high in wholefoods and limiting use of processed vegan foods, such as vegan cheeses, vegan meats. It requires supplementation.
- **NATURALLY LOW FAT:** if not using low fat variants of foods.
- **PALEO:** it can be high in saturated fats (from higher quality meat), but it's also high in fruit/vegetables.
- **KETO:** not very good for inflammation, but can help some people with diabetes. Very restrictive and not suitable for everyone.

Dairy Free, Gluten Free, Time Restricted, Low FODMAP, Low Carb: can be anti inflammatory depending on your circumstances (e.g. intolerances).

TOP TIPS

- Increase **omega 3 fats:** replace meat/animal fats with oily fish (or vegan sources of omega 3 such as flax seeds and olive oil).
- Fill your plate with **colourful** fruits and vegetables.
- Choose **whole grains** such as brown rice, barley and quinoa.
- Swap **processed foods** and artificial ingredients (colours, flavours, emulsifiers, trans fats etc) for better alternatives if you can. It's important to know what foods cause the most damage to our health, if eaten regularly (but you don't need to remove them from your diet completely).
- If you experience anxiety around food don't try to restrict your diet: **add instead of removing**, and focus on lifestyle changes.
- It's not just about food! **Good sleep, low stress and exercise** are just as important for inflammation and your overall health.

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For more information visit: www.thejoyofeating.net





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