

We often think of inflammation as the pain, swelling, and stiffness associated with post-workout soreness or conditions like rheumatoid arthritis. But the symptoms of inflammation may not always be so obvious. Chronic inflammation at the cellular level is linked to a host of health issues, including cardiovascular disease, cancer, lupus, Alzheimer's, ulcerative colitis, and Crohn's disease.

Inflammation also contributes to the aging of our skin, as well as other conditions like eczema and psoriasis.

And while medications and injections can bring (temporary) relief, they're not without side effects. Even over-the-counter anti-inflammatory medications can cause gastrointestinal irritation, ulcers, and an increased risk of bleeding. Steroid injections can cause bone loss, and can raise blood sugar levels in people with diabetes.

Many things can increase inflammation in our bodies, including our diets, stress, smoking, and being overweight. Achieving or maintaining a healthy weight, not smoking, exercising regularly, and managing stress all can help to manage inflammation.

There are a lot of factors that influence whether a food is inflammatory-promoting or has anti-inflammatory properties, but here are some general do's and don'ts to reduce the inflammatory processes in our bodies:

Limit inflammatory foods

Sugar is one of the top pro-inflammatory foods, so consider this just one more reason to limit added sugars in your diet. Steer clear of foods with added sugar in the ingredient list, including brown sugar, molasses, corn syrup, high fructose corn syrup, and "natural" sugars like honey, agave, turbinado, organic cane juice, and coconut sugar.

Refined carbohydrates. As with sugar, there are plenty of reasons to limit processed carbs; inflammation is just one more. Limit foods made with enriched wheat flour (translation: white flour), as well as other refined carbohydrates like potato starch, tapioca starch, and white rice flour.

Trans fats, which fortunately are now less plentiful in our food supply compared to 10 years ago. Careful though, as some "perceived-as-healthy" foods still can contain a significant amount of trans fats, including stick margarine and microwave popcorn, so check labels closely.

Nitrites, commonly found in sausage, bacon, hot dogs, and deli meats. Look for products labeled as containing no added nitrites or nitrates.

Omega-6 fats found in oils like vegetable oil, corn oil, sunflower oil, soybean oil, and most types of regular mayonnaise and deep-fried foods.

Add more anti-inflammatory foods

Omega 3-rich fish like salmon, tuna, sardines, and halibut.

Probiotics like those found in Greek yogurt, kefir, kombucha, and sauerkraut.

Berries and tart cherries. They're rich in anthocyanins, antioxidants that can help to reduce inflammation.

Chili peppers contain a compound called capsaicin, which inhibits inflammatory processes. The hotter the pepper, the more capsaicin it has.

Spices like **turmeric, ginger, and cayenne pepper** are packed with natural anti-inflammatory properties.

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