

Healthy foods like fish high in Omega-3 fats, leafy greens, and deep colored vegetables and fruits aren't just good for you, they're also delicious!

It has become clear that chronic inflammation is the root cause of many serious illnesses including heart disease, lipid disorders, many cancers, and Alzheimer's disease. Inflammation is the cornerstone of the body's healing response; but when it persists or serves no purpose, it damages the body and causes illness. Stress, lack of exercise, genetic predisposition, and exposure to toxins (like first- or second-hand tobacco smoke) can all contribute to such chronic inflammation, but dietary choices play a big role as well.

Inflammation inside the body can be caused or worsened by eating foods that are processed or that contain saturated fats, trans-fats, refined sugars, refined flour, or high fructose corn syrup. These types of food also tend to pack on the pounds, speed up the aging process, and worsen inflammatory processes already at work in the skin such as acne and rosacea.

So instead of eating bakery, deli meats, fast foods, processed frozen meals, and fried foods filled with unhealthy ingredients that cause inflammation, try some anti-inflammatory foods that reduce inflammation and promote health:

- **Fish that is rich in omega-3 fats**, including wild Alaskan (not farmed) salmon, herring, halibut, snapper, striped bass and tuna
- **Minimize consumption of animal-based proteins.**
- It would be best to replace cow's milk with almond milk, as almond milk contains 50% more calcium, less sugar, and no hidden estrogen. (My family and I found, and most patients agree, that Blue Diamond tastes better than Silk brand almond milk.)
- If you eat yogurt, we recommend organic yogurt labeled with "active yogurt cultures," "living yogurt cultures," or "contains active cultures." Greek yogurt has more protein and less sugar, but also less calcium than non-Greek yogurt).
- If you eat beef, it is best to choose grass-fed, grass-finished beef over grain-fed beef. Grass-fed beef is more flavorful and higher in omega-3 anti-inflammatory fat than grain-fed meat.
- Poultry should be skinless because poultry fat, concentrated just beneath the skin, contains arachidonic acid, which promotes inflammation.
- **Avoid "low fat" foods**, as low-fat prepared foods are often highly sweetened, and many of the studies used to support the low-fat recommendation of the past 40 years had serious flaws.
- **Avoid foods with chemically altered fats, such as hydrogenated vegetable oils** found in many prepared foods, as these raise cardiovascular disease risk.
- **Extra-virgin olive oil** rather than vegetable oil. There may be new guidelines coming out about saturated vegetable oils soon, such as coconut oil.
- **Salads that contain a variety of deep colors:** broccoli; tomatoes; red, orange, and yellow peppers; carrots; pomegranate seeds; strawberries; and blueberries
- **Dark green leafy vegetables:** spinach, kale, chard, and other vegetables that are rich in antioxidants, vitamin C and other nutrients that help to reduce inflammation
- **Fruits**, such as cherries, apples, blueberries, raspberries, strawberries, pineapple, oranges, lemons and limes. Cherries and blueberries are especially effective anti-inflammatory fruits that are packed with antioxidants and available frozen all year round.
- **Whole grain starches**, such as brown or wild rice, corn, oatmeal, sweet potatoes, and quinoa are better sources of fiber and less inflammatory than refined cereals, pastas, crackers and breads made with flour. If you find you are unable to eliminate bread and cereal products, try to choose ones with whole grains as the first ingredients and look for the following ratio: (Protein plus Dietary Fiber) x 3 should be less than or equal to the Total Carbohydrates.

- Herbs and spices that flavor foods but are no- or low-calorie, such as **turmeric, garlic, ginger, thyme, parsley, rosemary, basil, cinnamon and mint**
- **Water** is the best way to hydrate your body. Avoid pop, either sweetened or diet.
- **Green tea, white tea, and red tea** contains natural anti-inflammatory compounds that may reduce your risk of heart disease or cancer.
- If you feel the need to sweeten your tea or oatmeal, **agave nectar** is a natural sweetener with a low glycemic index that tastes better and is less inflammatory than artificial sweeteners that have actually been found to increase appetite and may in fact be hazardous. Raw local honey helps build immunity to local pollen.

When you replace pro-inflammatory foods with anti-inflammatory foods you help clarify your skin. In addition, you reduce inflammation within your body, promote weight loss, decrease pain associated with inflammation, and lower your risk for chronic heart disease. Keep up with inflammation-reducing exercise and add some regular form of relaxation, such as reading or yoga, and you should be well on the road to experiencing improved whole body health.

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