ANTI-INFLAMMATORY FOODS

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Ongoing, low-grade inflammation underlies many common health problems. These include heart disease, type 2 diabetes, certain cancers, digestive issues, arthritis, and various brain disorders. Among the top causes of chronic inflammation are unhealthy eating, physical inactivity, and obesity (especially belly fat). Chronic infections, unbalanced gut bacteria, and toxin exposure also promote inflammation. A healthy lifestyle, including nutritious eating habits, helps tame inflammation.

INFLAMMATORY FOODS TO LIMIT OR AVOID

- Highly processed foods
- Fast food
- Products from grain-fed animals
- High omega-6 oils, such as corn and soybean
- Highly processed fats, like deep-fat fried
- Refined grains/carbs
- Refined sweeteners
- Soda
- Alcohol
- Any food you are sensitive to

HOW FOODS FIGHT INFLAMMATION

Whole foods like vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, nuts, and seeds are rich in inflammation-fighting compounds. These include many vitamins, minerals, phytonutrients (plant compounds), and fiber. Omega-3 fats and probiotics (good bacteria), found in some animal and plant foods, can also calm inflammation.

The nutritional components of foods work in different ways to control inflammation. Some prevent the body from making as many inflammatory molecules. Others work as antioxidants to protect cells against damage from inflammation. Some promote a healthy community of gut bacteria, which can also help combat inflammation.

The following sections highlight foods with anti-inflammatory benefits, as shown in research studies. Similar foods in these categories could also have anti-inflammatory benefits but may be less well-studied.

VEGETABLES

Vegetables offer fiber and antioxidants, including beta-carotene, which gives an orange color. Vegetables are also super sources of green and red phytonutrients that fight inflammation. Some of the top anti-inflammatory vegetables are:

- Dark green leafy vegetables: lettuce (such as romaine and green leaf), spinach, Swiss chard
- Cruciferous vegetables: broccoli, broccoli sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, collards, kale, mustard greens
- Other vegetables: beets, carrots, garlic, onions, tomatoes

*Information adapted from The Institute of Functional Medicine

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FRUITS

Fruits provide fiber and antioxidants, including vitamin C. Many fruits are also rich in phytonutrients that reduce inflammation. Purple, red, and other bright colors are clues that fruits are high in phytonutrients. Enjoy these options:

- Berries: blackberries, blueberries, cranberries, raspberries, strawberries
- Citrus fruits: oranges, grapefruit, lemons, limes
- Other fruits: apples (with peel), cherries, grapes, pomegranates

WHOLE GRAINS

The fiber and phytonutrients in whole grains promote healthy gut bacteria that make anti-inflammatory byproducts. Whole grains are also good sources of selenium and zinc, which are two minerals with antioxidant properties. Consider these whole grain choices:

- Gluten-free grains: brown rice, pigmented rice (red, purple, or black), buckwheat, gluten-free oats, millet
- Gluten-containing grains: barley, rye, whole wheat, including spelt and Kamut® (if you are not gluten-sensitive)







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LEGUMES

Legumes are rich in plant protein and phytonutrients with antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties. Legumes are also super sources of fiber to promote healthy gut bacteria. Enjoy whole and minimally-processed legumes, including:

- Soy foods: edamame, soy milk, soy nuts, tofu (buy organic/non-GMO)*
- Other legumes: beans (such as black, garbanzo, kidney), lentils, peas

*GMO means genetically-modified organisms.

NUTS & SEEDS

Nuts and seeds offer various nutrients linked with anti-inflammatory benefits, including B vitamins, vitamin E, magnesium, selenium, and zinc. These crunchy treats also provide anti-inflammatory phytonutrients, healthy fats, and fiber. Here are some of the best anti-inflammatory options:

- Nuts: almonds, Brazil nuts, pistachios, walnuts, mixed nuts
- Seeds: chia seeds, flaxseeds (ground or flaxseed meal), hemp seeds, pumpkin seeds, sesame seeds

FERMENTED FOODS*

During fermentation, some microbes release anti-inflammatory compounds. Plus, eating fermented foods containing live probiotics promotes healthy gut bacteria, which also make anti-inflammatory agents (such as CLA). Some anti-inflammatory fermented foods tested in studies include:

- Fermented dairy products: kefir, yogurt
- Plant-based ferments: sauerkraut, kimchi (fermented cabbage and other vegetables), tempeh (fermented soybeans formed in a block)
- Fermented beverages: kombucha (fermented black or green tea)
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*If you are histamine-intolerant, fermented foods may trigger symptoms.

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HEALTHY FATS

Monounsaturated fats, omega-3s, and conjugated linoleic acid (CLA) are anti-inflammatory fats in some plant-based oils and animal products. Plus, plant-based oils offer phytonutrients and vitamin E to fend off inflammation. Try these top sources of anti-inflammatory fats:

- Oily fish: wild-caught salmon, anchovies, halibut, herring, sardines, trout
- Olive products: olives and olive oil, especially extra-virgin olive oil
- Other: avocados, omega-3 enriched eggs, grass-fed animal products

HERBS, SPICES & TEA

Many herbs, spices, and teas are rich in phytonutrients that can help calm inflammation. Use them often to boost your intake of their healthy plant compounds. Here are some options shown to have anti-inflammatory benefits:

- Herbs and spices: cardamom, cinnamon, ginger, saffron, thyme, turmeric
- Tea: black tea, cistus tea, green tea, yerba mate tea

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