



FOOD &
DRINK

A Beginner's Guide to Fighting Inflammation with Food

MAY 21, 2020 · 7 MINUTE READ · CATHARINE NIXON R.N.



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Metaphorically speaking, inflammation in your body is like a fire and eating certain foods can help extinguish it!

Do you have any 'fires' that need putting out?

From the rolling hills of Hollywood to goggle-ridden research labs, foods are being heralded as a secret weapon to fight off inflammation and mitigate the risk of developing disease.

Many of today's health conditions are driven by [chronic inflammation](#) which makes it imperative to understand not only how to avoid igniting the fire in the first place, but how to put it out.

So how do these 'secret weapons' work, and what are they?

Let's take a look at what you need to know.

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The magic of plant-based foods

Antioxidants

The antioxidants and non-nutrient antioxidants found in plant-based foods neutralize free radicals, reduce oxidative stress and reduce inflammation.

That's a lot to take in so just think of **antioxidants** as bodyguards.

In plant-based foods they can be found in abundance so there's plenty to go 'round, it's more a matter of making sure you're munching on enough of them!

And enough is the KEY word if you want to counteract that continuous production of roaming free radicals that occurs as a result of our lifestyle choices. Left to roam unmanaged, free radicals silently fuel inflammation.

Given each antioxidant has a unique role to play, it's important to eat a variety of plant-based foods to capture diversity.

No better reason to take advantage of their uniqueness!

Phytochemical compounds

Phytochemical compounds (**non-nutrient antioxidants**) are only produced by plants. They offer protective benefits to help reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease, insulin resistance, Type 2 diabetes and various cancers [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#).

There are thousands of phytochemicals in existence, though scientists understand only a portion of them.

What we do know is that they give foods their colour, aroma and flavor, have anti-inflammatory properties, support our immune system and protect us from the damaging effects of free radicals [\[4\]](#).

Food innovators use phytochemicals as a way to create functional food products with the promise of boosting health.

What are functional foods? Well, they offer health benefits beyond just their nutritional value.

You may have noticed there has been a steady rise of the healthy snack food industry in the last few years. This is the direct result of our insatiable appetites for a combination of convenience and wellness all in one.

Prebiotics

Another important warrior in the fight against inflammation are **prebiotics**.

[We love prebiotics](#) at Vitamin C and so do our [little guts!](#)

Our digestive system depends heavily on having plenty of energetic good gut bugs to break down undigested foods into **short chain fatty acids** (SCFA's). Prebiotics are the essential fuel sources in this process and can be readily sourced from plant-based foods.

SCFA's could also be considered great 'fire extinguishers'! They are capable of reducing inflammation as well as

promoting regulation of glucose, metabolism and immune responses.

So as a simple rule, more prebiotics means more help 'extinguishing' that inflammation.

Anti-inflammatory plant-based food list

5 high value vegetables (there are many more)

- **Green leafy vegetables** are all rich in polyphenols, brilliant at chasing away free radicals and fighting oxidative stress. They are also a good source of omega-3.
- **Tomatoes** are rich in the phytochemical lycopene, an excellent free radical scavenger^[5]. Lycopene absorption can be increased by cooking the tomatoes in olive oil.^[6]
- **Beans** are high in concentration of polyphenols, making them a good source of micronutrients.
- **Beetroot's** betalain pigments create its bright purple red color and make it a potent antioxidant choice. Rich in folate and fibre beetroots are inflammation reducing warriors.^[7]
- **Onions** inhibit inflammation through their quercetin properties.

5 fabulous fruits

- **Blueberries** are the berry champions when it comes to antioxidant capacity. Jam packed with vitamins B, C & E plus zinc, iron and selenium.
- **Red grapes** contain natural pigments called anthocyanins that give them their red color. The seeds and skins contain the highest concentration of antioxidant resveratrol.^[8]

- **Cherries** contain some of the highest amounts of phenols in comparison to other fruits and are known for their benefits in reducing oxidative stress and inflammation. [\[9\]](#)
- **Pomegranates** antioxidant potency is thanks to its punicalic acid and punicalagins.
- **Avocados** contain omega-3 fatty acids and 20 different minerals and vitamins. It's also recognized as a fruit not a vegetable.

Nuts

All nuts are rich in omega-3 fatty acids. In other words, healthy fats! Plus they're a good source of antioxidants with high concentrations of polyphenols.

- **Walnuts** in particular are noted most for their high concentrations of omega-3 fatty acids.
- **Almonds** are a popular protein packed snack eaten best raw over roasted!

Seeds

- **Flaxseeds** are very rich in omega-3, fibre, protein and lignan. Lignans is a group of polyphenols.
- **Chia seeds** are high in fibre and provide another good source of omega-3 and antioxidants. These tiny black seeds are a nutritious addition to salads, puddings and smoothies.

Spices

- **Turmeric** is well regarded for its anti-inflammatory potency due to containing curcumin. [\[12\]](#)
- **Garlic**, well known for its immunity boosting properties, contains also vitamin B6, vitamin C and other essential nutrients. Organosulfur compounds found in garlic deliver anti-inflammatory benefits. [\[13\]](#)

Wholegrains

Wholegrain foods are packed with fibre, an essential gut health food source and linked to reducing inflammation.

Gut bugs produce short-chain fatty acids (SCFAs) when they digest fibre, generating anti-inflammatory benefits. Butyrate is one of these SCFA's produced which helps reduce intestinal inflammation. Consuming fibre also helps to support the health and growth of the gut bugs.[\[10\]](#)

It's always best to choose wholegrains over refined grains when possible. Whole grains hold more nutritional value and are less inflammatory (which is the point of this article).

A few healthy wholegrain choices:

- Quinoa
- Barley
- Brown Rice
- Whole wheat
- Whole Oats
- Buckwheat

Healthy fats

We commonly hear the terms omega-6 and omega-3 essential fatty acids.

They are both recognized as essential fatty acids, but there is a difference and it's recommended that you have a balanced ratio between them.

The recommended ratio is 4:1 (omega-6 to omega-3). But the actual ratio reported in modern diets is around 15:1-17:1 and possibly even more unbalanced. [\[14\]](#) [\[15\]](#)

So what does this mean?

It indicates that the diet of today's westerners includes more processed foods and less nutritious dense foods, elevating risk factors for increased inflammation, cardiovascular disease and cancers. [\[11\]](#)

Another interesting fact: our bodies are unable to make either of these fatty acids and therefore it's up to us to find a source.

Omega-6s are found in polyunsaturated fats of nuts, seeds and vegetable oils. Processed food typically contains extracted oil from these sources, thus increasing the likelihood that we will consume more than we need.

Just to clarify, omega-6s are an essential fatty acid that we need to consume but they are to be eaten in **moderation!**

Omega-3 can be found in fish, plant-based foods and flaxseeds, and break down into 3 different groups DHA, EPA and ALA. In order to obtain all 3 it's important to consume from a variety of sources.

Rich sources can be found in **oily fish** such as **sardines, salmon, trout and tuna**.

Omega-3s are associated with reducing risk for arthritis, depression and heart disease. Best to munch on them everyday.

Lean Proteins

Proteins are an important part of our diet and can be readily sourced from both animal and plant sources. Again, our choices are important when seeking an anti-inflammatory source.

Plant-based options

- Chickpeas
- Nuts
- Seeds
- Lentils
- Black beans
- Tofu

Non plant-based options

- Fish
- Shellfish
- Lean cuts of poultry, beef, pork
- Low-fat dairy, in particular Greek yogurt

Put out the fire for good

If you're an avid Vitamin C reader, you'll know that [what you eat](#) has a big impact on your road to good health.

There is a strong link between poor food choices and chronic inflammation, and subsequently a link to many of today's chronic diseases, cancers and inflammatory conditions which is well documented.

Feeding your body with less inflammatory foods through better food choices is vital to maintaining good health.

Swap out highly processed, sugary, fatty foods and drinks in exchange for wholefoods, plant-based, healthy fats and lean proteins. Let your taste buds run wild, become a food adventurer and soak up the countless medicinal benefits.

If you would like to learn more about how to customize a diet rich in anti-inflammatory foods for yourself, it's worth a [quick consultation](#) with your health practitioner or dietitian.



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Informing. Connecting. Empowering.

Pro-inflammatory foods include fried foods, sodas, refined carbohydrates, and red meat. Green vegetables, berries, whole grains, and fatty fish are thought to be anti-inflammatory. By following an anti-inflammatory diet you can fight off inflammation for good. Updated: August 29, 2020. Published: June, 2014. What does an anti-inflammatory diet do? Your immune system becomes activated when your body recognizes anything that is foreign—such as an invading microbe, plant pollen, or chemical. This often triggers a process called inflammation. Intermittent bouts of inflammation directed at truly threatening invaders protect your health. However, sometimes inflammation persists, day in and day out, even when you are not threatened by a foreign invader. Here are 13 foods thought to fight inflammation. Foods high in sugar and saturated fat can spur inflammation. “They cause overactivity in the immune system, which can lead to joint pain, fatigue, and damage to the blood vessels,” Scott Zashin, MD, clinical professor at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas, tells Health. The good news is, plenty of foods can actually curb inflammation. Add these items to your plate today. 1 of 14. Beginner Kettlebell Workouts. Start Transforming 3. Start Transforming 2. Top 10 Inflammation-Fighting Foods. Ivan Blazquez. January 15, 2019 • 12 min read. It is the synergistic qualities of these foods that make them so healthy since they are nature-made and have a naturally high antioxidant status along with some quite fascinating natural substances that have a powerful anti-inflammatory and pain-relieving effect (Liu, 2003, 2004). These 10 foods will be in no particular order. Add more of these healthy inflammation-fighting foods to your daily diet to see the benefits. Cherries. Pictured recipe: Anti-Inflammatory Cherry-Spinach Smoothie. Cherries pack a wallop of antioxidants that help temper inflammation, including anthocyanins (an antioxidant found in red and purple fruits and vegetables) and vitamin C (well-known for its immune-boosting properties). In a review of 29 studies looking at both tart and sweet cherries, 80% of the trials showed that cherry consumption decreased markers for oxidative stress and 70% showed that it lowered inflammation.