# Reducing Inflammation

Sandra Akins
YOGA & NUTRITION



# Seven steps to reduce inflammation.

Food & Lifestyle strategies

## Inflammation is a normal and necessary response to infections and supports healing after an injury.

Inflammation is a normal and necessary process that helps the body fight infections and heal from injuries. However, inflammation may become harmful when it continues for an extended period or occurs without a clear injury or infection.

Chronic inflammation has been associated with several health conditions, including cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, arthritis, metabolic disorders, and certain autoimmune conditions.

No single food should be presented as a complete solution for inflammation. The greatest benefits generally come from following a balanced eating pattern and consistently practicing healthy lifestyle habits.

***Mediterranean-style, DASH, vegetarian, and other plant-forward eating patterns emphasize minimally processed foods and have been associated with better cardiovascular health and healthier inflammatory markers.***



## Step 1: Build an Anti-Inflammatory Eating Pattern

Choose foods that provide fiber, unsaturated fats, antioxidants, vitamins, minerals, and naturally occurring plant compounds known as phytonutrients.

These nutrients support cardiovascular, digestive, and metabolic health. They are also commonly found in dietary patterns associated with healthier inflammatory responses.

Foods to Include Regularly

Omega-3-Rich Fish

For people who eat fish, good choices include:

- Salmon
- Sardines
- Mackerel
- Anchovies
- Trout

These fish provide EPA and DHA, two forms of omega-3 fatty acids. Omega-3-rich fish can be included as part of a heart-healthy eating pattern. However, food should not replace appropriate medical care for an inflammatory or chronic health condition.

Healthy Sources of Fat

- Extra-virgin olive oil
- Avocado
- Walnuts
- Almonds
- Ground flaxseed
- Chia seeds
- Pumpkin seeds

Walnuts, flaxseed, and chia seeds provide alpha-linolenic acid, or ALA, a plant-based form of omega-3 fatty acid.

Extra-virgin olive oil is one of the primary fat sources used in a Mediterranean-style eating pattern.

Fruits

- Blueberries
- Strawberries
- Raspberries
- Blackberries
- Cherries
- Oranges and other citrus fruits
- Pomegranates
- Red or purple grapes
- Apples
- Pears

Try to choose a variety of colors throughout the week. Different colors generally provide different combinations of vitamins, minerals, fiber, antioxidants, and phytonutrients.

Vegetables

- Spinach
- Kale
- Collard greens
- Broccoli
- Brussels sprouts
- Cabbage
- Cauliflower
- Sweet potatoes
- Beets
- Carrots
- Tomatoes
- Bell peppers
- Onions
- Mushrooms

When practical, aim to fill approximately half of your plate with vegetables and fruit.

Legumes

- Lentils
- Chickpeas
- Black beans
- Pinto beans
- Kidney beans
- Edamame

Legumes provide plant-based protein, fiber, vitamins, and minerals.

Regularly replacing some processed or high-fat meats with beans, lentils, or other plant-based proteins may support a more heart-healthy eating pattern.

Whole Grains

- Oats
- Barley
- Quinoa
- Brown rice
- Farro
- Whole-grain bread
- Corn tortillas
- Whole-grain tortillas

Choose whole grains more often than refined grains because whole grains retain more of their natural fiber and nutrients.

Herbs and Spices

- Turmeric
- Ginger
- Garlic
- Cinnamon
- Rosemary
- Oregano
- Basil

Herbs and spices are excellent ways to add flavor while reducing dependence on excessive amounts of salt, sugar, butter, or heavy sauces.

Most people can use turmeric safely as a culinary spice. However, concentrated turmeric or curcumin supplements are different from normal culinary use. Supplements may cause digestive side effects or interact with certain medications.

Additional Options

- Unsweetened green tea
- Matcha without excessive added sugar
- Dark chocolate containing at least 70% cacao, enjoyed in a small portion
- Plain yogurt with live cultures
- Kefir
- Miso
- Tempeh
- Kimchi
- Sauerkraut

Fermented foods may be included in a balanced diet, but they are not necessary for everyone.

Some fermented foods, including kimchi, miso, and sauerkraut, can be high in sodium. Portion size and total daily sodium intake should be considered, especially for individuals with high blood pressure or other medical conditions that require sodium restriction.

Foods to Limit Rather Than Fear

***A healthy approach to reducing inflammation is not based on labeling individual foods as "good" or "bad."***

Instead, reduce the frequency and portion sizes of foods that contain large amounts of added sugar, sodium, refined carbohydrates, saturated fats, or trans fats while providing relatively little fiber or nutritional value.

Consider limiting:

- Sugary beverages
- Candy
- Pastries
- Desserts
- White bread

- Heavily refined grains
- Processed meats, such as bacon, sausage, hot dogs, and many deli meats
- Frequently fried foods
- Chips
- Heavily processed snack foods
- Fast food
- Highly processed frozen meals
- Foods containing trans fats
- Large quantities of butter, cream, fatty meats, and other foods high in saturated fat
- Excessive amounts of alcohol

A balanced eating pattern should emphasize fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, nuts, seeds, fish, lean or plant-based proteins, and unsaturated fats.

It should also limit added sugars, excess sodium, processed meats, saturated fats, trans fats, and heavily processed foods.

## An Important Note About Seed Oils

Soybean, corn, sunflower, and similar vegetable oils should not automatically be described as inflammatory.

Research involving humans has generally not shown that linoleic acid, the primary omega-6 fatty acid found in many of these oils, directly increases inflammatory markers.

A greater concern is that these oils are often present in heavily processed foods or foods that have been repeatedly fried.

The entire food, the cooking method, the quantity consumed, and the person's overall dietary pattern are more important than the presence of one individual oil.

Artificial sweeteners and dairy products should also not automatically be labeled inflammatory for everyone.

Individual tolerance, allergies, digestive conditions, medical history, overall dietary patterns, and the amount consumed should all be considered.

## Step 2: Move Your Body Consistently



Regular physical activity can support cardiovascular health, blood sugar regulation, healthy body composition, mobility, sleep, and emotional well-being.

Adults should generally work toward:

- At least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity each week
- Muscle-strengthening activities on at least two days each week
- Less prolonged sitting throughout the day

Moderate-intensity activities may include brisk walking, swimming, dancing, or cycling.

Exercise can be divided into shorter sessions. Someone who is currently inactive may begin with five- or ten-minute walks and gradually increase the duration and intensity.

People with heart disease, significant joint problems, recent surgery, balance concerns, or other medical limitations should consult a qualified healthcare professional before beginning or substantially changing an exercise routine.

## Step 3: Support a Healthy Body Composition

Excess visceral fat, which is the fat stored around the abdominal organs, is associated with metabolic changes and the increased production of inflammatory compounds.

When medically appropriate, gradual weight reduction may help improve metabolic health and support healthier inflammatory markers.

However, weight is only one part of overall health. Avoid extreme diets and focus on sustainable habits, such as:

- Eating balanced meals
- Including adequate protein
- Consuming fiber-rich foods

- Practicing portion awareness
- Strengthening your muscles
- Moving consistently
- Managing stress
- Getting adequate sleep

People who are underweight, pregnant, recovering from an illness, living with an eating disorder, or managing a chronic medical condition should not attempt weight loss without individualized guidance from an appropriate healthcare professional.

## Step 4: Prioritize Restorative Sleep



Inadequate or poor-quality sleep can affect appetite, glucose regulation, blood pressure, mood, energy levels, and inflammatory processes.

Most adults should aim for approximately seven to nine hours of sleep each night.

Helpful sleep practices include:

- Going to bed and waking up at approximately the same times each day
- Keeping the bedroom cool, dark, quiet, and comfortable
- Reducing exposure to bright screens before bedtime
- Limiting caffeine later in the day
- Avoiding heavy meals shortly before bedtime
- Creating a calming bedtime routine
- Getting regular physical activity
- Spending time in natural daylight during the day

Persistent snoring, insomnia, daytime exhaustion, or pauses in breathing during sleep should be discussed with a qualified healthcare professional.

## Step 5: Limit Alcohol



Chronic or excessive alcohol consumption may damage the intestinal lining, disrupt immune function, affect sleep, and contribute to inflammation in the gastrointestinal tract, liver, and other tissues.

People who do not drink alcohol should not begin drinking for perceived health benefits.

People who choose to drink should limit their intake and follow any restrictions provided by their physician or another qualified healthcare professional.

Alcohol may need to be avoided completely during pregnancy, when taking certain medications, before driving, or when living with liver disease, a history of alcohol-use disorder, or certain other medical conditions.

## Step 6: Address Chronic Stress



Short-term stress is a normal part of life. However, prolonged stress can affect sleep, digestion, blood pressure, appetite, eating habits, mood, immune function, and inflammatory responses.

Stress may also worsen symptoms for some people living with chronic pain, digestive disorders, autoimmune conditions, or inflammatory health concerns.

Helpful stress-management practices may include:

- Slow breathing exercises
- Meditation

- Mindfulness
- Gentle yoga
- Walking outdoors
- Journaling
- Spending time with supportive people
- Taking regular breaks from work and technology
- Participating in relaxing hobbies
- Seeking counseling or mental health support when needed

These practices may support overall well-being, but they should complement appropriate medical or psychological care rather than replace it.

## Step 7: Focus on the Whole Pattern

Reducing chronic inflammation is not about following a perfect diet or relying on one “superfood.”

It is the result of many small and consistent choices.

Helpful habits may include:

- Eating mostly minimally processed foods
- Including vegetables or fruit with most meals
- Choosing legumes and whole grains regularly
- Using unsaturated fats more often than saturated fats
- Moving your body most days
- Strengthening your muscles
- Sleeping consistently
- Avoiding tobacco products
- Limiting alcohol
- Practicing stress management
- Attending regular medical checkups

Anyone experiencing persistent pain, swelling, unexplained fever, severe fatigue, digestive bleeding, unintentional weight loss, or other ongoing or concerning symptoms should seek medical evaluation.

These symptoms should not automatically be attributed to diet or inflammation without an appropriate medical assessment.

***Professional and Medical Disclaimer***

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***Sandra Akins, Certified Nutrition Coach***