

Dietary Guidelines for Optimum Health: The Anti-Inflammatory Diet

Tom Hendrickson, D.C.

**“Let food be your medicine.”
Hippocrates**

Introduction

The food we eat profoundly affects not only our current health, including our mental state and our emotions, but also our future health. Every moment of every day our old cells are dying and new cells are being created. These new cells are created from the nutrients we ingest through the food we eat. It is very sobering to think that seven out of every ten deaths in the U.S. are caused by chronic diseases, and that most of these diseases are preventable. Unhealthy eating contributes to obesity, heart disease, cancer, and diabetes. When our diet consists of healthy foods, we feel greater vitality, help heal disease, help manage allergies, reduce the pain of arthritis, and create greater mental clarity. If our cells are getting the vital nutrients they need, we are less likely to crave additional food to help fulfill these deficiencies. We feel more satisfied, more “filled up”, not only physically, but emotionally. I believe that diet is the essential starting point to being healthy. There are many other factors that are important to optimum health such as exercise and quality supplements, but a good diet is the foundation.

Nutrition and Inflammation: The Anti-Inflammatory Diet

About 70% of our immune cells are in our digestive system, making direct contact with the food we eat every day. If the immune system is triggered by bacteria in food, or senses that a food is an allergen, it can set off inflammation. For example, the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition reported that processed sugars and other high-glycemic starches, such as cookies and cake, increase inflammation.

In the past few years, research has shown the correlation between chronic inflammation and most chronic diseases. The inflammatory response is a natural response from our immune system to an injury or infection or in response to a substance not recognized by the immune system. There are two types of inflammation, acute and chronic. We are familiar with the acute inflammation that we have after an injury because the inflamed area swells and gets red and painful. But chronic inflammation is not visible and often doesn't have any symptoms until it has damaged blood vessels and joints and we are diagnosed with heart disease or diabetes or arthritis. The best blood test for chronic inflammation is to measure your C-reactive protein (CPR). Chronic inflammation is a newly recognized factor in Alzheimer's, stroke, diabetes, cancer, arthritis, irritable bowel syndrome, and asthma. In fact, studies now show that inflammation in the blood vessels is as big a threat to our heart as cholesterol.

The good news is that diet and simple life style changes can reduce or eliminate chronic inflammation. For example, maintaining a healthy weight, exercising regularly, and avoiding smoking can lower inflammation. Also, a healthy anti-inflammatory diet plays a key role in reducing inflammation.

Foods that promote chronic inflammation (to be avoided or minimized):

- **Trans fats** (labeled as partially hydrogenated vegetable oil) – Known to trigger systemic inflammation. Trans fats are found in fast foods, fried foods, processed snack foods, frozen breakfast products, cookies, donuts, crackers and most margarines. Look at ingredient labels to make sure the foods you buy don't include partially hydrogenated oils.
- **Saturated fats** – Studies show that saturated fats trigger adipose tissue (fat) inflammation, which is not only a trigger for heart disease but also worsens the inflammation of arthritis. Pizza and cheese are the biggest sources of saturated fats in the average American diet according to the National Cancer Institute. Minimize red meat, processed meats (sausage, bacon, ham, smoked meats), and full-fat dairy products.
- **Sugar and white flour** – Sugar releases inflammatory chemicals called cytokines. Avoid white sugar and high fructose corn syrup along with refined carbohydrates such as cookies, and pastries, which also use white flour. White flour products (breads, rolls, crackers), white rice, white potatoes (instant mashed potatoes, french fries) should be avoided. Drink pure water instead of sugary drinks.
- **Excessive consumption of omega-6 fatty acids** – They can trigger the body to produce pro-inflammatory chemicals. Omega 6 fatty acids are found in corn, safflower, sunflower, grapeseed, soy and peanut oils, vegetable mayonnaise and many salad dressings. Eat more Omega-3 fatty acids, which are anti-inflammatory and are found in olive oil, walnut oil, flax oil, and oily fish such as salmon, sardines, or herring. I also recommend taking omega-3 supplements, which have a powerful anti-inflammatory effect.
- **Gluten and casein** – These are proteins found in wheat and dairy that may promote inflammation. Many people have gluten and dairy sensitivities or allergies. Gluten is found in wheat, rye, barley and any foods made with these grains. If you are not feeling radiant health, I recommend eliminating gluten and dairy from your diet.
- **Alcohol** – Some people are very sensitive to alcohol and drinking any alcohol promotes inflammation (increases C-reactive protein). Excessive alcohol can also weaken the gut, allowing bacteria to move out of the colon and into the body, a condition called “leaky gut,” which leads to inflammation.
- **Aspartame** – It's a non-nutritive artificial sweetener found in more than 4,000 products. Since it is a neurotoxin, your immune system will react to it as a “foreign substance” and trigger an inflammatory response.
- **Coffee** – If you have chronic pain, avoid drinking **coffee**. If you have radiant health and drink coffee, limit yourself to one cup a day. Since coffee is very acidic, excessive coffee can lead to inflammation.

Components of a Healthy Diet

Carbohydrates

Carbohydrates are the most important category of food since they are our main source of energy and should constitute 50-60 % of our daily diet. The key is that we want to eat healthy, complex carbohydrates, such as grains, rather than simple carbohydrates, such as cookies. Contrary to what most Americans think, carbohydrates are not “bad”. But you need to understand what kind of carbohydrates to eat to promote good health.

A healthy diet consists of a foundation of natural, complex carbohydrates, including grains such as brown rice and oats, beans, high fiber breads and cereals, fruits and vegetables. Whole grains lower levels of C-reactive protein (CRP). Beans are full of fiber, which also lowers CRP. Beans are also excellent sources of protein, which is important for muscle tone, and provide folic acid, magnesium, iron, zinc, and potassium, which benefit the heart and immune system.

Fruits and vegetables are also carbohydrates. Try to eat at least five servings each day. Cut up your favorite vegetables like celery and carrots for snacks, or put them in a salad, or eat them with hummus (ground garbanzo beans). Fruits and vegetables are packed with anti-oxidants. They cut the risk of heart disease up to 70%, and reduce the risk of diabetes and cancer. I encourage all my patients to buy organic produce, to avoid the herbicides, pesticides, and other contaminants in commercially grown produce. Complex carbohydrates have fiber and this is important in your diet. Fiber helps lower cholesterol, blood pressure, the risk of diabetes and cancer, and helps control weight.

Fats

There is a current myth in America that all fat in the diet is bad. But like carbohydrates, there are both good and bad fats.

A **healthy diet** consists of a diet rich in unsaturated fats, which are found in plant foods, as well as omega-3 essential fatty acids found in fish, nuts, flaxseed, canola, olive and walnut oil, and avocados. Consider using olive oil for your salad dressing, and clarified organic butter (ghee) for your toast or on your steamed veggies. Olive oil is used in Mediterranean countries, which consume up to 40% of their calories from fats. These cultures have the greatest longevity and have the least heart disease, cancer and other chronic diseases.

Proteins

Next to water, protein is the most abundant substance in the body. In fact, 50% of the body's weight is protein. It is part of every cell in the body. Protein is the major component of muscles, tendons, ligaments, bones, the blood, skin, hair, nails, and all your internal organs. Protein is needed to make hormones, enzymes, and antibodies.

How much protein do we need?

Protein cannot be stored in the body, so we must eat some protein every day. However, most Americans eat twice as much protein as they really need, because most of it comes from animal sources and dairy, rather than from plant protein, such as grains and beans (legumes), nuts and seeds, and vegetables. Yes, vegetables contain protein. High animal protein diets place an increased workload on the kidneys and liver. People with allergies, autoimmune problems, liver or kidney problems need to have a plant based diet. Cow's milk should be avoided in all forms if you have allergies.

Eat high quality protein

When you buy meat, buy “organically” raised meats, which are free from antibiotics and hormones. Commercially raised animals are fed antibiotics and hormones, which are believed to increase the risk of breast cancer in women and prostate cancer in men. Poultry has only 30% saturated fat. The fat is where the pesticides and environmental toxins are stored, so eat the poultry without the skin. Red meat is marbled with saturated fat. Beef fat is the worst, with 51% saturated fat. Fish is the best source of animal protein. It is rich in the healthy omega-3 fatty acids. Buy wild caught fish, rather than farmed, which is often fed antibiotics. And minimize shellfish. They are bottom feeders, and are more likely to pick up toxins.

Minimize grilling, broiling or pan frying meat or poultry. These cooking methods create damaged proteins, which trigger inflammation. Bake your fish or chicken instead.

Supplements that help reduce inflammation

- **Vitamin A** – keeps your immune system from over-reacting to irritants and therefore reduces inflammation.
- **B Vitamins** – lower levels of inflammation by lowering homocysteine and C-reactive protein.
- **Vitamin C** – an anti-oxidant that helps lower inflammation.
- **Vitamin D** – low levels of D have been linked to rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, irritable bowel syndrome.
- **Vitamin E** – another anti-oxidant that's an anti-inflammatory.
- **Omega-3s** – have powerful anti-inflammatory effects.

In addition to a healthy diet, I recommend that all my patients take a full complement of supplements, such as Shaklee's Vitalizer strip, to reduce inflammation and promote cellular vitality. I take Shaklee supplements every day to keep my body functioning at its optimal level. Ask Claudia, Jeanette, or Elaine for my handout, “Why I Take Supplements” for more information about what I take and why.

In Health,

Tom

September 20, 2017