



Effective ways to manage inflammation

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Abstract

Inflammation is your body's response to injury or infection and helps keep you healthy. But when inflammation lasts too long, it can become harmful. Chronic inflammation has been linked to a range of health conditions, including diabetes, heart disease, and arthritis. This report explains what chronic inflammation is, why it matters, and what kinds of everyday steps can help reduce it. These include physical activity, avoiding tobacco, and reducing harmful exposures. Food also plays a major role, and many nutrients that both cause and can reduce inflammation can be found in what we eat. Reducing inflammation often involves the same choices we make to prevent other chronic diseases, and small changes can make a meaningful difference over time.

Introduction: why inflammation matters

Inflammation is your body's way of protecting itself when something is wrong — whether that's an injury, illness, or even exposure to harmful chemicals. But inflammation that sticks around for too long can start to do harm to our healthy tissues. That is called chronic inflammation.

Chronic inflammation has been linked to a range of health conditions, including diabetes, heart

disease, high blood pressure, arthritis, asthma, and memory problems. It's often triggered or made worse by things we come across in daily life, like a poor diet, lack of physical activity, long-term stress, or exposure to pollution. These are many of the same risk factors that contribute to chronic disease in general. Lowering inflammation helps protect your overall health.

Healthy habits that help

The same habits that reduce inflammation also help prevent chronic disease. Regular movement supports your immune system and helps regulate inflammation. For people, the recommendation is at least 150 minutes of moderate activity per week whether it be walking, biking, or dancing.

Avoiding tobacco is also essential. Smoking increases inflammation throughout the body and makes most chronic conditions worse. If you use tobacco, your provider can help you find tools to quit.

Keeping a healthy weight and habits matters too. Fat tissue can increase inflammation, and

alcohol may do the same, especially in large amounts. Try to keep drinking limited, if at all. Pollution and chemical exposure can also play a role. You can't always control what you're exposed

to, but your provider may be able to help you lower risk where possible.

Together, these steps can help reduce overall inflammation and improve quality of life.

Food as medicine

What we eat affects inflammation — and diet is an effective tool to manage it. Many people look to supplements such as zinc and omega-3, though supplements are not always reliable because they are not regulated as carefully as drugs. In many cases, whole foods can provide the same nutrients in a more balanced and beneficial way.

Foods that help reduce inflammation include:

- Fatty fish (like salmon)
- Colorful fruits and vegetables (like leafy greens, berries, citrus, bell peppers)
- Whole grains (like brown rice, oats, quinoa, whole wheat)
- Healthy fats (like extra virgin olive oil, nuts, seeds, avocados)
- Legumes (like beans, lentils)
- Spices with anti-inflammatory properties (like turmeric, ginger, garlic)

Foods that may increase inflammation include:

- Processed meats (like bacon, sausage, hot dogs, deli meats)
- Red meat (like steak)

- Fried foods (like fries, fried chicken, donuts)
- Refined grains (like white bread, white rice, pastries)
- Foods high in added sugar (like candy, desserts, sugary cereal)
- Sugar-sweetened drinks (like soda, sweetened teas, energy drinks)
- Foods high in trans fats (like margarine, microwave popcorn, packaged baked goods)
- Ultra-processed snack foods (like chips, packaged crackers, instant noodles)

Two eating patterns that are especially helpful for reducing inflammation are the DASH and Mediterranean diets. The DASH eating plan focuses on fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, whole grains, and low-fat dairy, while limiting sodium and sugar. The Mediterranean diet includes healthy fats, fish, whole grains, and mostly plant-based foods, with little red meat or sweets. Research has shown that both diets can help reduce inflammation and lower the risk of chronic illness.

If you are considering supplements, check with your provider first.

For more information

- [Cleveland Clinic: What is Inflammation?](#)
- [Harvard Health: Playing With the Fire of Inflammation](#)
- [Johns Hopkins: Anti-Inflammatory Diet](#)
- [NHLBI: DASH Eating Plan](#)
- [Cleveland Clinic: Mediterranean Diet](#)

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