



HEALTHY EATING

Taming arthritis: A guide to anti- inflammatory eating

For those living with arthritis, some of the most popular tools to fight against inflammation can be found at the grocery store. Yet with so much nutritional advice and options available today, even navigating these aisles can be overwhelming – which foods are the optimal ones to choose, and which should be avoided?

Understanding inflammation and arthritis

When the body's immune system detects anything foreign, such as pollen or microbes, it triggers an inflammatory response. While acute inflammation is short-lived and promotes healing, chronic inflammation, which persists, contributes to joint pain, swelling, and stiffness. Inflammatory types of arthritis are the result of misdirected inflammation, such as rheumatoid arthritis and psoriatic arthritis.

The role of anti-inflammatory foods

While no diet is a magic bullet, maintaining a well-balanced diet can support a healthier lifestyle and aid in managing arthritis symptoms. In an [Arthritis talks webinar](#), registered dietitian Cristina Montoya highlighted some practical advice and tips for anti-inflammatory, arthritis-friendly eating.

The standard Western diet, she says, has been found to include many pro-inflammatory compounds, such as ultra-processed foods, refined sugars and red meats. These can trigger the body to produce pro-inflammatory chemicals. Diets high in sodium can also elevate the expression of inflammatory biomarkers. Certain conditions are directly aggravated by specific dietary choices. For example, following

a diet that is rich in red meat and consuming fructose-sweetened beverages increases one's risk of gout.

Ingredients containing anti-inflammatory compounds, on the other hand, are suggested to modulate pro-inflammatory pathways, reducing inflammation in the body.

A study published in Frontiers in Nutrition found that, while not a complete cure-all, the effective incorporation of anti-inflammatory food items in one's everyday diet may help to reduce rheumatoid arthritis disease activity, delay its progression, and reduce joint damage. "Patients are always interested in alternative treatments to relieve their debilitating condition. We believe that one should promulgate diet therapy for RA [rheumatoid arthritis] patients," the authors noted.

One anti-inflammatory way of eating is rooted in the Mediterranean diet. This diet emphasizes

healthy fats such as extra-virgin olive oil and nuts, along with plant-based foods.

Here are some tips for fighting inflammation with foods to ease your symptoms and fuel your body:

- Practice mindful and intuitive eating – think about what you are eating and the types of food that make you feel energized
- Stay hydrated with fluids such as water and green tea
- Prioritize whole grains (such as quinoa, brown rice, and pumpernickel bread)
- Eat a variety of legumes (such as edamame, chickpeas, lentils and tofu)
- Up your intake of foods that are rich in Omega-3 fatty acids such as nuts (walnuts) and seeds (flax and hemp)
- Opt for low and medium glycemic (GI) foods, such as raw carrots, sweet potatoes, green bananas and beets (fun fact: as bananas

ripen, their glycemic index rises, making overripe bananas ideal for baked goods like banana bread, allowing you to reduce the amount of added sugar). Check out these [banana date protein muffins](#) that use ripe bananas and are full of nutrients!

- Choose dark green leafy vegetables (kale, spinach, arugula, Swiss chard)
- Spice up your foods with herbs and spices such as cinnamon, turmeric and ginger (incorporating more herbs and spices also allows you to cut back on the amount of salt used)
- Support your gut microbiome with prebiotics and fermented foods such as kimchi and sauerkraut

Foods to limit or avoid

- Red meat and processed meat
- Ultra-processed foods, like baked goods,

microwaveable dinners and sugary cereals

- Artificial sweeteners
- Refined carbohydrates such as white bread

Tips for starting an anti-inflammatory diet

Look at your overall dietary pattern and begin with small, gradual changes, focusing on adding rather than eliminating foods. There are numerous ways to add anti-inflammatory-rich ingredients to foods you already enjoy. For a nutritious healthy breakfast, consider a waffle topped with fresh raspberries, hemp seeds, powdered cinnamon, and a light hazelnut spread. Spread some almond butter on an apple, bulk up your salad with quinoa or swap whole wheat bread for white bread.

Here are some more helpful guidelines to help you kickstart your anti-inflammatory eating journey, including tips for meal prepping:

- Adopt a meal prep plan that fits with your schedule, batch cooking at least once per week
- Keep convenience foods handy, such as pre-cut vegetables and pre-packaged salads
- Aim for simple recipes with 5-10 ingredients (like turkey burgers or lentil soup)! Such recipes are much easier to manage, particularly during times when you are experiencing pain or fatigue.

By making small adjustments and eating mindfully, you can take an active role in managing your arthritis. As Cristina stresses, "always keep ingredients simple." Even small changes, when consistent, can empower you to find relief.