Foods That Fight Inflammation

By: Dr. Alyssa Musgrove

Inflammation has been associated with just about every health condition. Inflammation is not always bad. It can be the body’s natural attempt to heal itself and eliminate damaged cells, viruses, and bacteria. Acute inflammation starts quickly and disappears in a few days. Chronic inflammation, however, can last months or even years. A sedentary lifestyle, stress, minor food allergies, and poor diet are just a few of the most common contributors to chronic inflammation.

Chronic inflammation will not typically produce symptoms until actual loss of function occurs somewhere. Chronic inflammation tends to be low-grade and systemic, silently damaging your tissues over an extended period of time. This process can go on for years without you noticing until disease suddenly sets in.

Since chronic inflammation tends to be “silent,” how can you determine if inflammation is brewing in your body? Clinical tests used in allopathic medicine include:

* **C-Reactive Protein (CRP) test**: Measures a protein found in your body that signals responses to any forms of inflammation
* **EST (sed rate) test**: Checks for non-specific indicators of inflammation
* **Fasting blood insulin test**: Although usually used to screen for diabetes, it is also marker for inflammation. Typically, the higher fasting insulin levels are, the higher your levels of inflammation tend to be.
* **Thermography**: Also known as Medical Thermal Imaging, is an alternative test used to measure heat patterns in the body. Abnormal heat spots on the body are an indication of inflammation.

Eating a wide variety of anti-inflammatory foods on a regular basis can go a long way toward calming inflammation and preventing chronic health issues. The following foods deserve special mention for their ability to put a stop to inflammatory responses in your body:

**Animal-based omega-3 fatty acids**: The body converts omega-3’s into powerful anti-inflammatory chemicals. These fats can be found in fish like wild Alaskan sockeye salmon and krill oil. Studies have shown fish oil can relieve joint tenderness, reduce morning stiffness duration.

**Blueberries**: Blueberries are high in antioxidants. They are in season right now and available at local farmer’s markets. They are lower in sugar then most fruits, and can easily be added to a salad, yogurt or even frozen and added to a smoothie.

**Shiitake mushrooms**: These nutritional powerhouses contain ergothioneine, which inhibits oxidative stress and discourages inflammation. These mushrooms also contain a variety of other nutrients that most people do not get enough of in their diets, such as copper. The body cannot produce copper and depends on outside sources for supply. Copper deficiency has been found to be a factor in developing coronary heart disease.

**Garlic:**  Garlic has been heavily studied and shown to help with hundreds of different conditions. It has antioxidant, anti-fungal, anti-viral and anti-bacterial properties. Garlic also has sulfur-containing compounds, which can help support inflamed joints.

**High-quality herbs and spices**: These are among the most potent anti-inflammatory ingredients available, ounce for ounce. Spicing up your meals is not enough, but it is a great place to start.

**Fermented foods**: Optimizing your gut flora is important for a high-functioning immune system and helps ward off chronic inflammation. In fact, the majority of inflammatory diseases start in the gut, as the result of an imbalanced microbiome. Fermented foods help “reseed” your gut with beneficial bacteria and also help the body rid itself of harmful toxins such as heavy metals and pesticides, which can promote inflammation. Some fermented food options are kimchee, pickles, sauerkraut, kefir, kombucha and olives.

**Vitamin D**: This vitamin has been shown to inhibit inflammation. Sun exposure of 5-30 minutes at least twice a week on the arms, legs and face is a beneficial, natural source of this fat-soluble vitamin. Food sources include wild-caught salmon, mackerel, cod liver oil, tuna, sardines and mushrooms.

**Dark leafy greens**: Kale, Swiss chard, spinach and collard greens contain powerful antioxidants, which help protect against cellular damage. Choose organically grown veggies that are in season and from a local source. Try eating a fair amount of these greens raw.

Juicing is an excellent way to get more greens in your diet. Here is a quick and easy recipe for a healthy green juice that incorporates some of these anti-inflammatory powerhouses. It can be made in a blender instead of a juicer. You can strain the juice through cheesecloth for a thinner consistency, if desired. Wring out as much liquid as possible from the cheesecloth, as there are additional hearty nutrients in the pulp.

**Dr. Alyssa’s Anti-Inflammatory Green Juice**

- 1 ½ cups water

- 2 cups kale OR baby spinach

- 2 medium green apples, cored

- ½ cup parsley leaves

- 1 medium cucumber, cut into quarters

- 2 celery stalks, roughly chopped

- 1 piece of ginger (1 inch), peeled

- 2 Tbsp fresh-squeezed lemon juice

Add all ingredients to the blender in the order in which they are listed. Blend on the highest setting (such as liquefy), until the juice is well-blended. It should be the consistency of a smoothie. If you want to enjoy the pulp with your juice, pour mixture into glass and serve. If you prefer thinner consistency, strain through a cheesecloth.

*Pathways to Healing specializes in holistic chiropractic care. Dr. Alyssa Musgrove draws on a variety of techniques, including chiropractic, kinesiology, nutrition, food allergy testing and lifestyle counseling to assist clients in achieving optimal health and wellness in one setting. Pathways to Healing is located at 1022 Founders Row, Lake Oconee Village, Greensboro. The office can be reached at 706-454-2040.*