

# Dr. Louise Cash

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### **Anti-inflammatory Foods**

#### **Can the Foods You Eat Make a Difference in Chronic Pain?**

You may be familiar with the anti-inflammatory medications, but have you heard of anti-inflammatory foods? The foods you eat really do have an affect on how you feel.

#### **What is Inflammation?**

Inflammation is defined as a localized reaction of tissue to irritation, injury or infection. Symptoms of inflammation include pain, swelling, red coloration to the area, and sometimes loss of movement or function. We commonly think of inflammation as the painful component of arthritis. Inflammation is also a component of chronic diseases such as heart disease and strokes.

#### **Medical Anti-inflammatory Treatments**

Common medical anti-inflammatory treatments include rest, light exercise, weight management, stretching, and medications designed to reduce the inflammation and control the pain. These medications include Non Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDS), steroid medications, and perhaps ultimately joint replacement surgery. The NSAIDS are widely used as the initial form of therapy.

#### **Avoid Pro-Inflammatory Foods**

Pro-inflammatory foods will increase inflammation, increase your pain from the inflammation and may also raise your risk for chronic disease. Loading up on junk foods high-fat meats, sugar and fast foods will increase inflammation in your body. This is partially due to the unhealthy fats used in preparing and processing these foods, especially Trans fats and saturated fats. Processed meats such as lunch meats, hot dogs and sausages contain chemicals such as nitrites that are associated with increased inflammation and chronic disease.

Saturated fats are also found in meats, dairy products and eggs. While all of these foods are important source of minerals and vitamins, you don't need the extra saturated fat. These foods also contain fatty acids called arachidonic acid. While some arachidonic acid is essential for your health, too much in the diet may make your inflammation worse. Be sure to choose low fat milk and cheese and lean cuts of meat, which will not promote inflammation.

Diets high in sugar have also been associated with inflammation, obesity and chronic disease such as diabetes. Eliminate high sugar foods such as sodas, soft drinks, pastries, presweetened cereals and candy.

Another possible source of irritation comes from the nightshade family of plants. Whole fruits and vegetables are important to eat for their vitamins, minerals and natural antioxidants; however some vegetables like potatoes, tomatoes, and eggplant may actually make pain from inflammation worse. These vegetables are part of the nightshade family of plants and contain a chemical alkaloid called solanine. Solanine can trigger pain in some people. While there aren't any formal research findings that back the claim about nightshade plants, you can avoid them for a few weeks to see if your pain and symptoms of inflammation improve.

## **Choose Anti-inflammatory Foods**

Adding foods that reduce inflammation will improve how you feel and help to decrease your risk for chronic diseases. Here are some suggestions.

### **Fats and Oils**

The right types of fats in your diet will impact pain and inflammation in a positive way. Omega-3 essential fatty acids are very powerful anti-inflammatory agents. They are found in cold water oily fish, walnuts, flax seeds, canola oil and pumpkin seeds. Adding omega-3 fatty acid supplements from flax oil or fish oil may also help reduce inflammation.

Olive oil is another type of oil that will reduce inflammation. In fact, olive oil has been shown to reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease, and will help to reduce pain. Other healthy oils include rice bran oil, grape seed oil and walnut oil.

### **Protein**

Your body needs protein to build health body tissues. Good protein sources include lean poultry, fish and seafood, nuts, legumes and seeds. Red meats may trigger inflammation, so cut back on fatty red meats. When you do eat red meat, choose lean cuts of bison, venison and other game meats, or the lowest-fat cuts of beef, preferably grass-fed beef.

Soybeans, tofu and soy milk are three great sources of soy protein that may help to reduce your pain and inflammation.

### **Carbohydrates and Fiber**

Most of your carbohydrates should come from whole grains, vegetables and fruits. The bread, cereal and pasta in your diet should be 100% whole grain products. Whole grains are excellent sources of fiber, and a high fiber diet will reduce your inflammation.

Choose green leafy vegetables, green and brightly colored vegetables and fruits. You should eat at least five and preferably more servings of fruits and vegetables each day. Green vegetables and whole fruits are also important as sources of dietary fiber.

Berries are also a great food choice, especially blueberries and strawberries. The pigments in brightly colored fruits, vegetables and berries contain many phytochemicals that have anti-inflammatory properties. One example is quercetin, which is found in apple and red onion skins and has strong anti-inflammatory properties.

### **Healthy Beverages**

Your body needs water in the form of foods and beverages every day. The simplest and maybe best form of water is fresh drinking water. Other good fluid sources include 100% fruit juices, herbal teas & vegetable juices. Rule of thumb is to take 50% of your body weight in ounces of water each day i.e. a 200 lb person would drink 100 oz of water daily.

### **Anti-Inflammatory Diet Tips**

Over all, when you are choosing anti-inflammatory foods to help reduce your inflammation and pain, choose fresh foods over frozen; frozen over canned or heavily processed foods.

Here are some tips:

- Breakfast could be oatmeal with fresh berries & walnuts, with a cup of soy milk.
- Snack on whole fruits, nuts, seeds and fresh vegetables throughout the day instead of cookies, candy or chips.
- Eat more fish and less fatty red meat.
- Stay away from deep fried foods and bake or stir-fry your meals instead.
- Choose green, orange, and yellow vegetables for your side dishes.
- Drink plenty of water, fresh 100% fruit & vegetable juices, herbal teas and green tea.