

Anti-Inflammatory Foods

By Jack Challem

Chronic inflammation almost always lurks beneath the surface of diabetes and excess weight. You can't see or feel it, but this type of inflammation increases the risk of coronary heart disease, the leading cause of death among people with diabetes.

Processed sugars and other high-glycemic starches increase inflammation, just as they raise blood sugar, according to an article in the March 2002 American Journal of Clinical Nutrition.

Good news, though: Many foods have anti-inflammatory properties. Here are 11 of the best...

1. Salmon. Coldwater fish, including salmon, contain anti-inflammatory fats called omega-3s. Wild salmon has more of these super-healthy fats than does farmed salmon.

Shopping tip: All salmon from Alaska is wild, whereas Atlantic salmon is usually farmed. Herring, sardines, and tuna also contain omega-3s.

2. Grass-fed beef and other animal foods. As opposed to traditional, grain-fed livestock, meat that comes from animals fed grass also contains anti-inflammatory omega-3s, but in lower concentrations than coldwater fish. Free-range livestock that graze in pastures build up higher levels of omega-3s. Meat from grain-fed animals has virtually no omega-3s and plenty of saturated fat.

Cooking tip: Unless it's ground, grass-fed beef may be tougher, so slow cook it.

3. Olive oil. Olive oil is a great source of oleic acid, another anti-inflammatory oil. Researchers wrote in the October 2007 Journal of the American College of Nutrition that those who consume more oleic acid have better insulin function and lower blood sugar.

Shopping tip: Opt for extra-virgin olive oil, which is the least processed, and use it instead of other cooking oils. Other "cold-pressed" or "expeller-pressed" oils can be good sources, too.

4. Salads. Dark-green lettuce, spinach, tomatoes, and other salad veggies are rich in vitamin C and other antioxidants, nutrients that dampen inflammation.

Suggestion: Opt for olive oil-and-vinegar salad dressing (vinegar helps moderate blood sugar), and skip the croutons.

5. Cruciferous vegetables. These veggies, which include broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, and kale, are also loaded with antioxidants. But they provide one other ingredient -- sulfur -- that the body needs to make its own high-powered antioxidants.

(Next)

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6. Cherries. A study in the April 2006 Journal of Nutrition showed that eating cherries daily can significantly reduce inflammation. Cherries are also packed with antioxidants and relatively low on the glycemic index.

Tip: Frozen cherries are available all year long and make a tasty dessert with a little yogurt or cheese.

7. Blueberries. These delectable fruits are chock-full of natural compounds that reduce inflammation. Blueberries may also protect the brain from many of the effects of aging. Frozen are usually less expensive than fresh -- and just as good for you.

8. Turmeric. This spice contains a powerful, natural anti-inflammatory compound, according to a report in the August 2007 Biochemical Pharmacology. Turmeric has long been part of curry spice blends, used in southern Asian cuisines. To use: Buy powdered curry spice (which contains turmeric and other spices) and use it as a seasoning when pan-frying chicken breasts in olive oil.

9. Ginger. This relative of turmeric is also known for its anti-inflammatory benefits, and some research suggests that it might also help control blood sugar.

Suggestion: Brew your own ginger tea. Use a peeler to remove the skin off a piece of ginger, then add several thin slices to a cup of hot water and let steep for a few minutes.

10. Garlic. The research isn't consistent, but garlic may have some anti-inflammatory and glucose-regulating benefits and it may also help your body fight infections. At the very least, it won't hurt and makes for a tasty addition to food.

11. Green tea. Like fruits and vegetables, green tea contains natural anti-inflammatory compounds. It may even reduce the risk of heart disease and cancer.

Suggestion: Drink a cup a day -- or brew it like sun tea, refrigerate, and serve.

As you probably noticed, anti-inflammatory eating is right in line with healthy, diabetes-friendly eating. And it's the way we all should eat, whether we have diabetes or not: lots of plant foods and moderate portions of animal foods, as unaltered and unprocessed as possible. If everyone ate this way, we'd see a much larger portion of our population living healthier, longer lives.

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