

Anti-Inflammatory Diet

An often overlooked factor in addressing chronic pain is the role of diet. It is a little different than you might think. There is a moderate chance that if you have been suffering from chronic pain that you haven't been eating as healthfully as you ordinarily would and you are heavier than you would like to be. At the same time, you don't have the emotional energy to embark on a rigorous diet and losing weight is incredibly difficult. Besides, you do feel better when you flood your brain with pleasant sensations of taste and smell. There is good reason for the term, "emotional eating."

Start slowly

One of the core principles of lowering pain (anxiety) is lowering inflammation. Decreasing and processing threat is critical, but you can also lower inflammatory markers with a less inflammatory diet. Don't worry about losing weight. You can take this step now and there are many simple steps.

The first concrete one is to lower or stop eating food with a high-sugar content. You can take it in stages and you don't have to become rigid about it. You don't need that additional stress. Allow yourself to "fail" a few times a week or even a day. The key is to steadily cut back. Processed sugars are highly inflammatory and continuing a high consumption of them will work against your other efforts.

Principles of an anti-inflammatory diet

A nutrient-dense diet centered around whole foods that include fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, seeds and plant-based sources of protein, supplemented by herbs and spices, is extremely healthy. These whole foods are high in fiber, phytonutrients, good fats, and more than meets one's protein requirements - thus significantly improving immunity and decreasing inflammation.



On the other hand, calorie-dense diets such as the typical western diet are high in processed foods and contain significant amounts of saturated fat and salt, are low in fiber, and have few of the health-promoting nutrients found in a more plant-based diet, thereby promoting inflammation and weakening immune function.

Regardless of your weight, an anti-inflammatory diet will contribute to lowering your levels of inflammatory cytokines.

Intermittent Fasting

Intermittent fasting has been consistently associated with lowering inflammatory markers. The intervals vary. Two common approaches are fasting for two out of seven days. Another schedule is fasting for 16-18 hours daily, which means skipping one meal every day (de Cabo).

Dieting is always difficult, but many find that intermittent fasting is not as challenging as the other alternatives. Even if you only partially engage in this approach, it will help. Don't overlook this simple strategy. Research it and again, engage at a level that is comfortable to you. Becoming stressed about your diet is also inflammatory.

Supplements

Vit C – 500 mg three times per day – strongly anti-inflammatory

Vit D – 5000 units daily – Vit D deficiency is the most common vitamin issue in the Western World.

Vit K2 – 1000 mcg daily

Vitamin B's

Zinc 5 mg every 8 hours – allows your enzymes to function normally and is also a common deficiency as you age

Magnesium – 400 mg per day for adults – critical for enzyme function

Your weight

The issue of your weight needs to be separately addressed, as fat cells increase your inflammatory cytokine (communication proteins) load and contribute to adult-onset diabetes. Being overweight is especially hard on your health, if your body mass index (BMI) is greater than 35. BMI is a calculation based on your height and weight, and you can easily look yours up on the Internet (for example, at cdc.gov). The ideal range is from 18.5 to 24.9. A BMI between 25 and 29.9 is considered overweight, and over 30 is considered obese. The greater your BMI, the higher your risk for chronic disease.

However, until you have experienced a profound drop in your pain and improvement in your mood, it will be almost impossible to be successful in dropping your weight. That is why weight loss is initially a lower priority.

For a surgeon to be discussing nutrition is ironic, since we seldom have enough time to eat, much less think about what we are eating. I do not pretend to be an expert on the topic, but I find the data on the anti-inflammatory diet consistent and compelling. The fact that it can lower your inflammatory markers has been well documented. To find reliable information that can both educate and guide you, visit the website: <https://nutritionfacts.org/topics/inflammation/>.