

## The Anti-Inflammatory Diet, Part 1: Dietary Causes of Inflammation

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In the past year, I have seen growing interest concerning "anti-inflammatory diets" from both patients and medical doctors who refer patients for nutritional consultations. The two most common questions are: "What do you think about this new anti-inflammatory diet stuff?" and "When I looked it up, nobody seems to agree on exactly what it is." My standard reply is that I first heard the term more than 15 years ago and at that time it was a concept, rather than a specific diet. I explain that instead of getting hung up on Web definitions (such as all-organic, free range, all raw foods or GMO\* free vegetarian), they should focus on the basic underlying themes that fuel inflammation (Table 1) and see if patients have any areas that need to be addressed.

Table 1: Common Dietary Imbalances That Inflamm

Too many calories  
Too much saturated fat  
Too much sugar and refined carbs  
High omega-6 to omega-3 ratio  
High sodium to potassium ratio

The sources and/or causes of the imbalances in table 1 just so happen to be the same things that doctors, nutritionists and dieticians have counseled patients on (for years) to reduce and/or avoid (Table 2). Please note that there are exceptions for every scenario in table 2. Some examples would be: You can order moderate portions of healthy food at restaurants; protein powders with vitamins and minerals are highly processed, yet generally healthy; and consuming two sodas and a candy bar after running 26 miles does not have a negative effect on physiology. (Of course, the same cannot be said about those who have that snack while watching the race on TV.)

Table 2: Sources of Pro-Inflammatory Imbalances

Too much fast food  
Too much fried food  
Too much junk food  
Too many soft drinks  
Too many meals out  
Too many servings per meal  
Too much processed food  
Too much high-fat animal food  
Too many desserts  
Too much alcohol

Conversely, a typical fast-food lunch of, let's say, a cheeseburger, fries and a soft drink, delivers a meal that is high calorie, high saturated fat, high sodium, high refined carbohydrate and low

omega 3 fatty acid. In other words, all five dietary imbalances that can promote inflammation are present in a very common, very popular meal. If this person then has dinner consisting of three slices of pepperoni pizza, salad (iceberg lettuce, cherry tomato, croutons with blue cheese or Italian dressing) and a beer (not exactly an unusual dinner), the result is a second consecutive five-point pro-inflammatory exposure (high calorie, high saturated fat, high refined carbohydrates, high sodium to potassium ratio and high omega 6 to omega 3 ratio).

Next time, we will continue to explore this topic, including looking at a pro/anti-inflammatory food list and how to apply the concepts of reducing inflammation in practical ways for normal, busy people.

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