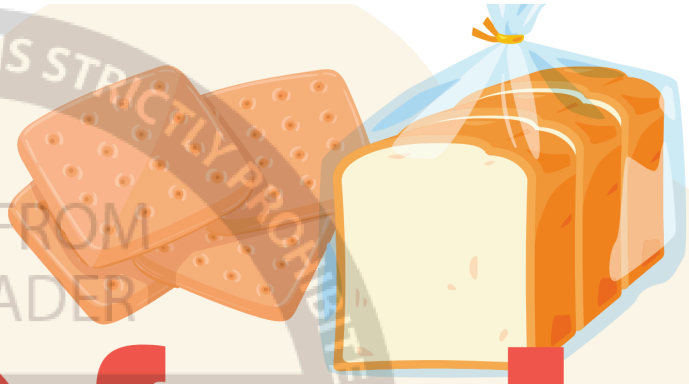
- Foods / Inflammation

30 DAYS TO Anti-Inflammatory Diet



10 foods that cause inflammation

Words: Charlie Watson

We know the best ingredients for helping to heal inflammation, but which ones should you avoid from the start? We reveal all...

Sugar-sweetened drinks

Often we don't count drinks into calories and sugar intake and yet they can be the biggest contributor to added sugar in our diet. Sugar-sweetened drinks are consistently linked to an increased risk of numerous inflammatory conditions, including cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes.

Swap for: Naturally flavoured sparkling water, fresh fruit juices (one small glass per day).

Alcohol

When alcohol is metabolised by the body, toxic compounds are produced and these can cause damage to the liver, gut and other organs, causing an inflammatory response. Additionally, drinking alcohol can harm gut health by reducing the production of anti-inflammatory bacteria.

Swap for: non-alcoholic alternatives including beer, spirits and wines, sparkling water, fruit juices.

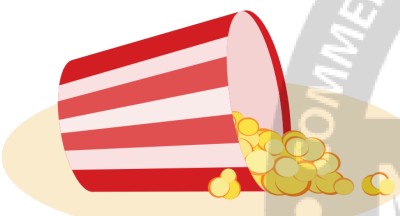
Trans fats

Trans fats are created by food manufacturers through hydrogenation, changing a food's texture and consistency and increasing shelf stability. There is no recommended safe level of trans fats in our diet.

Consuming trans fats has been found to increase levels of (bad) LDL cholesterol and reduce levels of (good) HDL cholesterol – increasing risk of developing heart disease.

Look out for hydrogenated oils or partially hydrogenated oils on the label as this indicates the presence of trans fats. These are found particularly in manufactured baked goods, margarine, crackers and microwave popcorn

Swap for: homemade baking, avocado oil, olive oil, choose whole foods.



Ultra-Processed Foods

Commonly referred to as UPFs, Ultra-Processed Foods are industrially formulated products with synthetic ingredients. Diets that are high in UPFs have been linked to an increased risk of inflammation, including higher rates of inflammatory bowel disease, colorectal cancer and irritable bowel disease.

Swap for: minimally processed or whole foods.

Deep Fried Foods

Fried foods often have higher levels of omega-6 fatty acids and trans fats – both of which increase inflammation within the body. When certain foods are cooked at high temperatures, harmful advanced glycation end products (AGEs) are produced – they are formed when fat or protein combine with sugar in the bloodstream. High levels of AGEs are associated with oxidative stress and inflammation, leading to increased rates of diabetes, heart disease, Alzheimer's and premature ageing.

Swap for: try air-frying, oven baking, pan or stir-frying, or steaming.

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Refined Carbs

These are carbohydrates that have been milled, removing the fibrous bran and germ, such as white bread, white rice, sugary cereals, white flour, pastries. Studies have found that diets higher in refined carbohydrates can increase inflammatory mediators and trigger insulin resistance (increasing rates of diabetes).

Swap for: whole grain options including wild or whole grain rice, brown or lentil pasta, whole grain bread, potatoes, oats, wholewheat flour. Aim for at least half of your grains to be whole grain.

Artificial Sweeteners

Artificial sweeteners have been replacing real sugars to reduce calories in snacks and drinks among other products. Some small studies revealed exacerbated gut damage and inflammation, while some experts believe that artificial sweeteners can alter normal metabolism, the gut microbiome and blood vessels that could promote high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes and unhealthy cholesterol levels. As use of artificial sweeteners increases and new products are released, more research is needed into the relationship between these 'fake sugars' and the incidence of inflammation.

Swap for: naturally occurring sugars or natural sweeteners like honey and maple syrup that may have antioxidant benefits.

Added Sugar

Sugar is added to a plethora of food products, from baked goods, ice-creams and sugary drinks, to kids' yoghurt, baked beans, bread and pasta sauces. This can be in the form of cane sugar, dextrose, maltose and high fructose corn syrup – it's important to check the back of packaging for ingredients lists and nutritional values.

Excessive sugar consumption is widely associated with impaired immune function and chronic inflammation. Sugar intake stimulates the fatty acids in the liver, the compounds created when the body digests these fatty acids can trigger inflammatory processes.

Swap for: naturally sweetened items, homemade products, check the food labels to choose options without added sugar.

Processed Meats

Studies have shown increased consumption of processed meats have a great risk of all-cause mortality and cardiovascular mortality than fish and unprocessed meat. The World Cancer Research Fund recommends limiting processed meat intake due to its link to colorectal cancers.

Swap for: fish, poultry, unprocessed meat options, meat-free alternatives.

Red Meat

This includes beef, lamb, veal, pork, mutton and goat meat and is due to increased levels of saturated fats compared to other meat sources. Recent studies have found that BMI had a big impact on inflammatory response to red meat, and that red meat alone did not impact C-reactive protein (CRP), a key indicator of inflammation in the body.

The World Cancer Research Fund is recommending that people eat red meat no more than three times per week, and consume less than 500g cooked/700g raw red meat per week to reduce the risk of colorectal cancer.

Swap for: fish, poultry and meat alternatives.

