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## 2 Fixes that Can Curb Inflammation

The word "inflammation" gets thrown around a lot these days, usually with negative connotations. It turns out, however, that inflammation isn't all bad. Indeed, it is the body's way of fighting off unwanted invaders and injuries, whether it be an infection in your lungs, a cut on your hand or a tear in your calf muscle. Inflammation is your body's way of protecting itself from the inevitable dangers faced in our everyday lives and beyond.

"Inflammation is a normal response in the body — everyone has it," says Deborah Enos, a wellness coach and certified nutritionist based in Seattle. "It's an important part of healing. It's when it goes haywire and you continue to have it that it becomes a problem."

Usually, inflammation will abate once an injury, illness or other stressor resolves. Autoimmune conditions like rheumatoid arthritis, lupus and multiple sclerosis are all due to chronic systemic inflammation, meaning that it happens throughout the body over a long period of time. Sustained high levels of inflammation have even been linked to a number of different forms of cancer.

This type of chronic inflammation occurs when the body thinks there is a threat and goes on the defense, even when there is no threat. The result is that the body can turn against itself. "Inflammation gone haywire can damage perfectly normal cells," says Enos. "Another big difference with chronic inflammation? It lasts much longer than normal healing time."

Even setting aside those more serious types of conditions, a lesser inflammatory response can lead to a number of health concerns, like joint pain, asthma and skin issues. "Anecdotally, the type of person who has chronic inflammation often isn't sleeping well, they have a poor diet and they don't get enough exercise," she adds. "They are probably someone who says, 'I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired.'"

Two of the most oft-cited causes of chronic inflammation are a poor diet and lack of exercise. In fact, research has shown that losing weight can reduce inflammation and improve a number of health-related factors. The key to fighting chronic inflammation is to understand the root cause, as well as how to address it with regards to diet and exercise.

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### 1. Poor Eating Habits

**The Issue:** "The typical American diet leads to chronic inflammation," says Enos. "At one point the number 1 'vegetable' consumed in the U.S. was French fries, which will only aggravate inflammation." Other dietary choices linked to chronic inflammation include eating too much salt, saturated fat or trans fat. Additionally, being overweight is a risk factor for chronic inflammation.

**The Fix:** Research suggests that a Mediterranean-type diet has an anti-inflammatory effect. This includes eating plenty of healthy fats, fruits, vegetables, legumes, grains and a moderate amount of protein. "Foods like wild Alaskan salmon, flaxseeds, olive oil and lentils help to prevent inflammation," adds Enos.



Cutting out highly processed foods and refined carbohydrates (like those French fries) and working in more whole grains is another good swap to make. Walnuts, almonds and other nuts, as well as dark chocolate, have all been shown to reduce inflammation, too.

## **2. Lack of Exercise**

**The Issue:** Again and again, studies have demonstrated that sedentary behavior and inflammation go hand in hand. What's more, the weight gain that often results from an inactive lifestyle appears to also prompt an inflammatory response in the body.

Not only can exercise assist in weight loss, it appears that it also leads to the release of anti-inflammatory chemicals into the bloodstream. The take-home is that even moderate amounts of daily exercise can play a major role in supporting a number of positive health outcomes.

**The Fix:** Both resistance training and aerobic exercise have been shown to reduce lab values related to inflammation in a wide variety of populations. It seems that even low-intensity activities, like walking or yoga, have a positive effect. One study found that when comparing people who engaged in light, moderate or vigorous physical activity with people who didn't exercise at all, those who did even light activity had lower levels of systemic inflammation.

"As far as anti-inflammatory strategies go, exercise is one of the number 1 things," says Enos. "Alternative methods of stress reduction, like guided meditation, yoga or walking outside, are helpful."

If reducing inflammation is your goal, just about any type of exercise is good for the cause. With that said, there is some evidence suggesting that a combined aerobic and resistance training regimen is best. It's all about finding what works for you and sticking with it over the long haul. You'll discover that even moderate amounts of additional exercise each day will go a long way toward reducing chronic inflammation you may not have known you had.

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