



THE OPTIMAL KITCHEN

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CONQUERING INFLAMMATION

Ultimately it is inflammation that plaques us pure and simple. Every contemporary chronic illness finds its root cause to be inflammation. Essentially inflammation starts off as a positive thing, inflammation itself helps fight off bacteria, virus and other dangerous cells. However when we feed that inflammation a steady diet of pro-inflammatory Omega 6 fatty acids through vegetable oils, refined grains, processed sugars and even meats fed a grain diet, the body's balance is thrown off and we fall into a perpetual state of inflammation. This is when we see diseases such as diabetes, arthritis, auto immune disorders and cardiovascular disease arise. The great thing is that the same types of anti-inflammatory foods help a myriad of illnesses making it easy for those who suffer from more than one, to control it through diet and lifestyle.

Foods high in Omega 3 fatty acids are the key to fighting inflammation but specific fruits and vegetables have compounds that help reduce symptoms of many illness. Anti-oxidants are key in the battle to reduce inflammation and different antioxidants play different roles in controlling inflammation, making variety important. This is where eating the rainbow comes into play. The colors fruits and vegetables are tell us a lot about why there are good for us to eat and to feed ourselves optimally we should always aim to get a good mix.

TOP TEN ANTI-INFLAMMATORY FOODS

Not surprising but the best foods to fight inflammation are members of the fruit and vegetable family. Making these foods part of your everyday diet is the best thing you can do for your body to fight inflammation.

1. Avocados
2. Onions
3. Broccoli
4. Spinach

5. Berries, especially blue
6. Flax Meal
7. Ginger/Tumeric/Clove
8. Mushrooms
9. Salmon
10. Walnuts

Fiber is a critical soldier in the fight against inflammation. Increased fiber consumption has been linked to a reduction in C Reactive protein, a compound produced in the liver that is linked to increased levels of inflammation. Fiber is abundant in fruits and vegetables as well as whole grains. Fiber also helps us feel full longer aiding with weight loss.

On a side note I want to talk about nightshades. This family of vegetables, which includes potatoes, tomatoes, eggplant and peppers is often believed to exacerbate chronic inflammation. All of these foods contain alkaloids called solanines which are powerful substances that can have a profound affect on our body. For most of us unless we consume vast quantities of these foods or eat green potatoes we never consume enough solanines to have a negative affect. In fact there is some research that believes there may actually be compounds that reduce inflammation in these very nightshades. That said many people are sensitive to nightshades and it may result in increased inflammation.

As much as I try to avoid talking about what foods to avoid and focus instead on what to add, but when it comes to inflammation it is actually really important to try and avoid certain foods that are known triggers.

1. Fried Foods
2. processed meats
3. SUGAR
4. refined grains
5. dairy

Sugar is the worst of all and essentially just feeds the inflammation and makes it thrive. Eliminating refined sugars is crucial to keeping inflammation levels in check. Opt instead for fruits or fruit sweetened treats and be sure they have a ton of fiber to help counter some of sugars negative effects because even the fruit sugars need to be balanced. We already know the other foods are unhealthy choices and should not be part of our everyday diet. However we can make small changes in other foods such as choosing only grass fed beef and wild caught fish which cause far less inflammation than their grain fed and farm raised cousins.

I chose these recipes because they will give you the most bang for your buck. They incorporate many anti-inflammatory foods in single dishes so you aren't just eating one. The ingredients can also be shared with many of the other dishes you eat throughout the week ensuring there is no food waste.

BEANS AND GREENS

1 can or 2 cups cooked white beans (rinsed)
2 cups fresh greens, chopped
2 cloves of garlic minced
juice and zest of 1 lemon
olive oil for cooking

- saute garlic in oil for a minute and then add greens
- once greens begin to wilt add lemon juice and zest
- add beans and saute until warmed throughout adding a bit more olive oil if necessary
- season with salt and pepper and serve

Onions play a special role with inflammation. The allium class of vegetables is one of the best infection fighters around, whether viral, bacterial or fungal. Since inflammation, even chronic, has roots in infection adding copious amounts of onions to your diet can help combat high inflammation levels. That said raw onions can cause digestive upset. This recipe slowly simmers them giving them abundant flavor and sweetness and also making them gentler to the digestive tract. What is even better is these onions are the perfect accompaniment to so many different foods. They go perfectly with grilled meats, roasted chickens, frittatas and all whole grains.

HERB CARAMELIZED ONIONS

2 to 3 lbs yellow or white onions, sliced
½ cup fresh herbs, basil, parsley, rosemary, thyme your choice
olive oil for cooking

- over low heat begin simmering sliced onions in the oil
- stir often to ensure onions don't stick and even cooking
- when onions are almost thoroughly cooked, this will take 20 mins or so, add the herbs
- ***if you are making a large batch to keep on hand for a week or more only add the herbs to the onions you want to eat that day
- season with salt and pepper and serve with grilled or roasted meats, fish and vegetables

BANANA COCONUT MUFFINS

4 ounces dates

2 eggs

½ cup olive oil

1 cup whole wheat flour (gluten free flour works well too but be sure to buy high fiber and protein varieties like chick pea, almond or coconut flours)

2 tsp baking powder

4 bananas mashed

¼ cup unsweetened coconut

½ cup walnuts optional

- in a food processor chop the dates and when chopped slowly add the olive oil
- add each egg one at a time and blend until mixture is frothy and doubled in volume
- whisk together flour and baking powder
- mash banana and then add flour mixture and date mixture
- once thoroughly combined add blueberries and then place in muffin cups and bake for 15 to 20 mins in a preheated 375 degree oven
- these muffins will last in the fridge for up to 2 weeks or go ahead and freeze

This special drink is believed to be one of the greatest tools at fighting inflammation. Try a small cup before bed to help with sleep as well as reducing inflammation overnight hopefully leading to a less stiff morning.

GOLDEN MILK

1 can light coconut milk

1 inch piece of fresh ginger peeled and sliced

1 inch of fresh tumeric, peeled and sliced

¼ tsp cinnamon

squeeze of lemon

- simmer all ingredients over low heat for about 10 mins and then let sit.
- This can be watered down a bit as coconut milk is rather rich
- drink 4 ounces before bed or upon waking

