

# 6 Ways to Fight Inflammation — Naturally

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**Avoiding NSAIDS like Ibuprofen and naproxen because of their potential side effects? Here are botanical alternatives that may fit the bill.**

Even when we get our eating habits in order, we might still need help managing occasional pain. Many caregivers suggest herbal remedies because they are safer overall and less problematic than NSAIDs, which fight inflammation and pain, but can also mask important warning signs or lead to larger problems, such as leaky gut syndrome, bleeding ulcers, or renal issues, among others. (For more on this, see “[This is Your Body on Ibuprofen](#),” by Kristin Ohlson (*Experience Life*, June 2014.)

Here are some commonly recommended botanicals, with recommended dosages, from Dan Lukaczer, ND, associate director of medical education at the Institute for Functional Medicine. (Please consult with your healthcare practitioner for an individualized plan.)



## **Turmeric**

This golden spice, ground from the rhizomes of a plant related to ginger, is a staple of Ayurvedic medicine; its active ingredient is curcumin. Turmeric has been cited in more than 2,500 published studies on numerous conditions, including asthma and cancer. In 2009, the *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine* found that curcumin is about as effective as ibuprofen in reducing the pain of osteoarthritis of the knee. Like many other botanicals, curcumin is not a quick fix and can take up to two months to be effective. In capsule form, take 750 to 1,500 mg daily. Many practitioners also suggest topical creams containing curcumin.

## **Boswellia**

This tree produces a resin that is used in incense and is another staple of Ayurvedic medicine. It is used to treat arthritis, ulcerative colitis, coughs, and asthma. Also known as Indian frankincense. In capsule form, take 300 to 400 mg three times daily.

## **Ginger**

People training for a marathon may want to try this Ayurvedic staple instead of NSAIDs: According to studies, taking ginger can reduce exercise-induced pain by up to 25 percent. Turmeric, boswellia, and ginger are often mixed together into one compound along with black pepper, which is thought to aid absorption. In capsule form, take 500 to 1,000 mg two to three times daily.

## **Bromelain**

An enzyme derived from pineapple, bromelain has long been used to combat indigestion and inflammation. Recent studies indicate that bromelain might be helpful for both workout-related injuries as well as arthritis. In capsule form, take 250 to 750 mg three times daily without food.

## **Capsaicin**

The active compound that gives cayenne peppers their heat, capsaicin is made into a topical cream used to treat both muscle aches and arthritic joint pain. It interferes with something called substance P, which is involved in both inflammation and sending pain signals to the brain. Apply capsaicin cream topically three times daily.

## Arnica montana

Topical preparations from this mountain daisylike plant have been used for centuries to treat bruises, sprains, muscle aches, wound healing, joint pain, and swelling from broken bones. One study found that arnica gel worked as well as ibuprofen in reducing pain in people with arthritis in their hands. New studies suggest that arnica may help with burns and postoperative swelling. Topical preparations shouldn't be applied to broken skin. Use arnica cream topically three times daily, or take three to four pellets (30x to 30c) three to four times daily.

*These recommendations originally appeared in "This Is Your Body on Ibuprofen."*

# Inflammation and Diet

By Marisa Moore, MBA, RDN, LD  
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Inflammation is a protective process you are probably more familiar with than you think. It's the body's method of healing itself in response to an injury or exposure to a harmful substance. This is useful when, for example, skin is healing from a cut; however, inflammation is not always beneficial.

Chronic (or ongoing) inflammation occurs when the immune system attacks the body's healthy cells leading to autoimmune diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis, states of immune deficiency including Crohn's disease or skin conditions including psoriasis. Underlying chronic inflammation also may play a role in heart disease, diabetes and Alzheimer's disease.



Evidence supporting the impact of specific foods on inflammation in the body is limited. We know that some foods have the capacity to suppress inflammation, but it's unclear how often and how much is needed for this benefit. Though there's promising research for the impact of foods such as fatty fish, berries and tart cherry juice, but beware of anything touted as an anti-inflammatory miracle.

"Current science advocates overall good nutrition to help enhance the body's immune system and provide antioxidants to reduce inflammatory stress," explains Cheryl Orlansky, registered dietitian nutritionist and certified diabetes educator.

"Healthy fats, such as omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids, reduce inflammation and help regulate membrane function," says Orlansky. These types of fats should be included in a healthy diet. "Remove those fats that turn on inflammatory processes, such as saturated fat from meats, butter, cream sauces, fried foods and *trans* fat found in many processed foods," Orlansky says.

That's the way to go versus focusing on one specific "superfood."

### Eating to Reduce Inflammation

Luckily, eating with reduced inflammation in mind may be easier than you think.

- Let fruits and vegetables make up at least half your plate at meals. Take care to regularly fit in fresh, frozen or dried berries and cherries. Be sure to eat a variety of vegetables, including leafy greens such as kale, chard and Brussels sprouts.

- Opt for plant-based sources of protein including beans, nuts and seeds.
- Choose whole grains instead of refined ones. Give up white rice and replace it with brown, black or wild rice; whole oats or barley for cream of wheat; and whole-wheat bread instead of white.
- Pick heart-healthy fats as opposed to not so healthy ones. Olive oil, avocados, nuts and seeds are a few delicious choices.
- Choose fatty fish such as salmon, sardines and anchovies to get a heart-healthy dose of omega-3 fatty acids.
- Season your meals with fresh herbs and spices. They pack a flavorful and antioxidant-rich punch.

Though diet is important, it's not the only factor. Quality and duration of sleep and other lifestyle factors can have a direct impact on inflammation.

Overall, to avoid issues with chronic inflammation, make it your mission to achieve a healthy diet, maintain a healthy weight, get adequate sleep and engage in regular physical activity.