

Eat This Way

Healthful diet may stop inflammation

Missy Keenan, Special to the Register 11:02 p.m. CDT October 26, 2014



At 43, Krista Jacob was concerned that she had developed acid reflux and her blood pressure was slightly elevated.

A friend told her about the anti-inflammation diet, saying it had cured her psoriasis and might be helpful for Jacob's conditions as well.

Inflammation is caused by the body's immune response to injury, toxins, allergy or infection, causing pain and swelling in the affected area. Inflammation can result in a wide variety of conditions, including heart disease, arthritis, migraine headaches, skin disorders such as eczema and psoriasis and breathing disorders such as asthma.

Following are some of the core tenets of an anti-inflammation diet. If you've read anything about healthy eating trends in recent years, these probably sound familiar:

- Drink plenty of water.
- Eat a variety of fruits and vegetables.
- Eat healthy fats, particularly those high in Omega-3 fatty acids like salmon and chia seeds; avoid less healthy fats such as soybean and corn oils, often found in processed food.
- Limit consumption of sugar and of processed sweets that contain sugar substitutes such as corn syrup.

"This way of eating can help people who already have an inflammatory condition, but it's important for prevention, too," said Lori Graff, a dietitian at the Hy-Vee supermarket in Waukee. "If we eat this way, we can prevent inflammation before it starts."

In addition to diets specifically labeled as anti-inflammation, the core principles above are also found in popular diets with other names such as Paleo, primal, clean eating, whole foods, and the

Mediterranean diet. Most of these diets also involve limiting or eliminating whole grains, limiting or eliminating dairy and focusing on high-quality protein sources such as grass-fed meat and eggs.

Vince Hassel, a chiropractor practicing in Clive, encourages all of his patients to eat an anti-inflammation, whole-foods diet.

“The traditional food pyramid is completely wrong in my opinion; it’s upside down,” Hassel said. “When I talk about the pyramid, the base is water. The next tier up is fruits and vegetables, then healthy protein, then healthy fat. Fat is essential for your body, but you’ve got to have the right fat like butter from grass-fed cows, avocado, olive oil and coconut oil.”

Most principles of the anti-inflammation diet are pretty straightforward, and help prevent and treat inflammatory conditions for most people. However, some people have inflammatory reactions such as migraine headaches or eczema when they eat specific foods, and may need to experiment with an elimination diet.

“If you have an ongoing condition that doesn’t go away even though it’s been medically treated, and you’re following a good whole-foods diet, then you might want to see if there’s a food causing your condition,” Graff said. “We always start with the common triggers first. We tell people eggs, dairy, soy, wheat, nuts and seafood. You can try avoiding those foods for a week or two to see if you feel better.

“If that doesn’t work, you may have to experiment with eliminating other foods,” she continued. “You never know what could be a trigger for you; one person’s nutrition may be another person’s poison.”

Unless you have specific food sensitivities or allergies, experts agree that your diet doesn’t need to be perfect. Instead, strive to follow anti-inflammatory dietary practices 75 to 80 percent of the time.

“I like to keep it simple,” Graff said. “I tell people that $\frac{3}{4}$ of their cart should be whole foods in a rainbow of colors and $\frac{1}{4}$ can be processed foods.”

Hassel and his family usually follow this diet during the week, and loosen up a bit on the weekends. “I tell my kids that during the week we’re going to eat healthy things like eggs with coconut oil or a good quality smoothie,” he said. “Then on the weekends if they want to have chips with their friends, or I want to be social and have a little wine or pizza, that’s OK.”

Jacob has been following the anti-inflammation diet about 75 percent of the time for seven weeks, still allowing herself to indulge in the occasional glass of red wine or her favorite sweets. She’s pleased that in this short time she’s already reflux-free without medication. Time will tell if it helps her blood pressure, but she’s optimistic.

“I’m not trying to lose weight. I like a bodacious booty,” she laughed. “I want to improve my diet as much as possible so I can be healthier. The concept of this diet makes sense to me, and in less than two months it’s helped improved my health.”

Anti-inflammation resources

- One book with information about the anti-inflammation diet and lots of recipes is “Meals that Heal Inflammation” by Julie Daniluk.
- For a no-nonsense introduction to the Paleo diet and lifestyle, try Mark’s Daily Apple at www.marksdailyapple.com.