



BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



Limit Chronic Inflammation Through Diet, Protect Your Brain Health

*The Brain Health Initiative (BHI) is working to develop brain healthy communities, creating a culture that promotes brain health protective factors and decreases risk factors, thereby improving brain health, optimizing brain performance, and preventing and fighting brain illness across the lifespan for the Florida Suncoast region and beyond. **Chronic inflammation has been shown to play a role in several debilitating diseases, including cancer, heart disease, diabetes and Alzheimer’s disease. There are many ways to reduce inflammation in your body and, in turn, reduce your risk of chronic illness. Today, we will focus on an anti-inflammatory, brain healthy diet.***

Inflammation is a dirty word in healthcare and for good reason. It’s the troublemaker that research has shown starts the ball rolling toward many chronic diseases in the body, including neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer’s, Parkinsons and ALS.

But inflammation does have a purpose: to protect and heal the body. It is a survival mechanism in response to injury, harm or illness that helps the body fight off harmful microbes such as bacteria, viruses, fungi, and tumors and repair damaged tissue.

There are two types of inflammation. Acute inflammation happens rapidly, with tissue swelling, capillary dilation, redness, heat, antihistamine activity, and pain. Harmful microbes are eliminated, and damaged tissue removed. Everything goes back to normal within a couple of days. Chronic inflammation begins the same way but can linger for months or years if the threat is not neutralized or if the inflammation is activated despite the absence of an illness or injury. The immune system prompts white blood cells to begin attacking healthy tissues and organs, and that leads to chronic diseases.

The body is particularly sensitive to inflammatory responses from what we eat. Added chemicals, including food coloring, artificial ingredients and toxins, for example, induce mild inflammation. Over time, if unchecked, that mild inflammation becomes chronic low-grade inflammation, which can lead to disease.

BHI's NeuroNutritionist and national best-selling author Dr. Uma Naidoo ([This is Your Brain on Food](#)) describes the gut/brain connection in which "information collected by the nerves in your gut is communicated directly to the brain, inducing an inflammatory response. Gut inflammation often occurs in response to an overgrowth of bad bacteria, which can be caused by an overconsumption of inflammatory foods, or an insufficient consumption of anti-inflammatory foods."

So what are "inflammatory foods?" Dr. Naidoo mentions added/refined sugars found in baked goods, boxed cereals, granola bars, and salad dressing; industrial vegetable oils such as corn, grapeseed, and soybean that contain omega-6 fatty acids; processed or packaged foods; processed meats, such as deli meat, hot dogs and sausages; gluten found in many wheat, barley and rye products; and coffee and alcohol.

Dr. Naidoo encourages us to eat more anti-inflammatory foods, including whole foods, such as berries, vegetables, legumes, whole grains, nuts, seeds, olive oil, and seafood; dark leafy greens; broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts and arugula; probiotics like onions, leeks, garlic, and asparagus; prebiotics found in yogurt and kimchi; turmeric; and dark chocolate.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY TO PROTECT YOUR BRAIN HEALTH

We've given you an overview of what types of foods cause inflammation and what types fight inflammation in the body. Below is a more specific guide from the BHI about what to eat in every season.

- **WINTER.** You may not think of the color green when winter comes to mind, but green, leafy vegetables are the way to go to reduce inflammation. Kale, collard greens, and Swiss chard are the best in that group. Beets, sweet potatoes and turnips are good, too, as are kiwi, Brussels sprouts, lemons, oranges, and pineapples.
- **SPRING.** As nature awakens from its slumber, reach for asparagus, apricots, carrots, avocados, rhubarb, mushrooms, celery and fresh herbs.
- **SUMMER.** Produce is everywhere when the weather gets hot. Pick berries, with blueberries, blackberries, and strawberries as the top options. But don't forget cherries, peaches, watermelon, honeydew melon, plums, eggplant, zucchini, okra, and green beans.
- **AUTUMN.** Apples are always popular at harvest time and do a great job fighting inflammation. Also try cabbage, winter squash, peas, ginger, parsnips, garlic and all types of lettuce.
- **EVERY DAY OF THE YEAR.** Make a good choice by substituting an anti-inflammatory food for a not-so-healthy one. Snag fruit instead of a muffin. Ask for a baked potato instead of French fries.

BE BRAIN HEALTHY and adopt a lifestyle that includes thoughts, behaviors, emotions, responses, and language that promote brain health protective factors:

- Stress resilience
- Nutrition
- Physical activity

- Sleep
- Social connection
- Emotional wellbeing
- Meaning and Purpose
- Cognitive stimulation and creativity
- Engaging with nature
- General health
- Positive impacts

About the Brain Health Initiative (www.brainhealthinitiative.org)

The Brain Health Initiative (BHI), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, uses a cutting-edge approach to protecting brain health, promoting brain performance, and preventing and fighting brain illness across the lifespan. The BHI is building brain healthy communities, cultures that foster brain health protective factors and address risk factors, thereby improving brain health and optimizing brain performance outcomes for the Florida Suncoast region and beyond. Join the ***Be Brain Healthy*** movement, ***because brain health matters, and lifestyle makes a difference.*** To view all Brain Health Boosts [click here](#).