

# MICHELLE

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# INFLATED NOTIONS

As inflammation remains at the heart of the health debate, MOJEH asks:  
Is it a health craze or cause for concern?

Every now and again, a new health concern and, ultimately, a new way of eating fights its way into our consciousness. There were acai berry bowls designed to revive our flailing levels of antioxidants, then there was our acidity intake that became balanced with avo-based everything. The avocado has, rightly, remained a dietary staple well into 2016, but our fascination has found a new focus – our body's natural defence system, inflammation. A phenomenon rising from the typical combination of recent medical research, media attention and, of course, those at the heart of digital health, inflammation has been named as a culprit for both physical and mental health concerns that range from depression and ADHD to chronic illnesses like cancer and heart disease.

"Inflammation is our body's natural and appropriate response to injury," explains Tanya Zuckerbrot, registered dietician and founder of the high fibre, lean-protein F-Factor Diet. Based in New York, Zuckerbrot's food habits are counted upon by the hot and high-powered from Ralph Lauren's daughter, Dylan, to Molly Sims and Rachel Roy.

"Symptoms include reddening, swelling, heat, soreness, and restricted range of movement. It can also be both internal and external," she continues.

## Words By Laura Beaney

Like most wellness waves, widespread interest in inflammatory-related issues first sparked our interest via digital media. With the announcement of the anti-inflammatory diet by those at the crossroads of health, beauty and wellness, our green juices soon turned to yellow lattes as turmeric was heralded as one of the most potent anti-inflammatory ingredients of them all. And, as our Instagram feeds were flooded with captions coveting a certain yellow spice, we started to wonder – should inflammation be of grave concern? Yes and no.

Of course, with the Internet comes a great deal of misinformation and, indeed, confusion. While research is ongoing, Harvard Health Publications agree with the online platforms on two points. Firstly, cancer, heart disease, diabetes, arthritis, depression, and Alzheimer's have all been linked to chronic inflammation and secondly, one of the most powerful tools to fight against inflammation comes from the fridge.

"Many experimental studies have shown that components of foods or beverages may have anti-inflammatory effects," according to Dr. Frank Hu, professor of nutrition and epidemiology in the Department of Nutrition at the Harvard School of Public Health. His claims are further supported by studies

into curcumin the plant compound that gives turmeric its bright colour and has demonstrated both anti-inflammatory and anti-cancer properties.

To explain the matter further, when we catch a cold or cut ourselves, inflammation fights against the infection for us. Indeed, the vast majority of us will have been prescribed anti-inflammatories for a range of ailments following a visit to the GP. But, how does our body's protective response become detrimental? Our immune system is designed to identify tissue under stress. To combat this, the system first employs a pathway called primary inflammation. The pathway works on two levels by detoxifying the tissues and by working to repair the injured cells. Usually, in low-stress situations, this response goes unnoticed as long as our system is working efficiently. We are, however, alerted to inflammation when there is a high-stress situation, for example, a physical trauma, recurring emotional stress, or an allergic reaction. But, this inflammatory response isn't just a by-product of injury or illness. Inflammation can be triggered by a range of aggravators, including a preservative-laden diet, exposure to chemicals, pesticides and pollutants, persistent stress, gastrointestinal issues, a sedentary lifestyle and the consumption of food allergens, like gluten and dairy.





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Zuckerbrot informs us that inflammation becomes problematic when it is persistent, long-term and chronic; for example, when the inflammatory response is excessive or in response to something inappropriate, like in the case of somebody with celiac disease who ingests gluten. "An inflammatory response is initiated and causes gastrointestinal damage," Zuckerbrot points out. Chronic inflammation is the type that calls for concern; it can not only inhibit our ability to lose weight, but the results can also lead to an increased risk of psoriasis, rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, asthma, Crohn's disease, Alzheimer's, cardiovascular disease, and depression.

In recent years, there has been much talk of anti-inflammatory drugs being used to treat mental health problems. Yet, Dr. Andrew Miller, who is leading studies in the link between inflammation and disorders like depression, says that one of our most common misconceptions is that inflammation is labelled as the "root of all evil". "Realistically, it is only relevant to those who have it," he says. How do we know if this is the case? For most of us, inflammation alone is not a disease or singular cause for concern. "Go to your doctor and get tested," says Miller. "If your C-reactive protein (CRP) is greater than 1mg/L, you are in the moderately inflamed category. If it is greater than 3 mg/L, you are into the high range," he advises.

In the case of the inflamed, a game plan for balance is required. The answer is, of course, one we are all accustomed to. Dr. Miller recommends a routine of exercise including meditation and yoga, social activity and a Mediterranean diet, which includes lean proteins, vegetables, legumes, and olive oil. Zuckerbrot, however, who is known for advising her high profile clients on minute details concerning restaurant menus around the clock, takes a highly targeted approach to her ingredients. "In order to combat inflammation, one should lower their intake of pro-inflammatory substances and increase their intake of anti-inflammatory substances," says Zuckerbrot. Refined carbohydrates and sugars are to be avoided, as well as Omega-6, which features heavily in modern diets and is found in vegetable oils like safflower, sunflower oil, corn oil, soybean, and canola oil. Mayonnaise, salad dressings, and sunflower seeds are also out, as they carry high levels of Omega-6 fatty acids. Thanks to the proliferation of the 'anti-inflammatory diet', the information surrounding alternatives is plentiful, with options suitable for any balanced diet. Omega-3 fatty acids can be found in fatty fish like salmon, mackerel, herring and sardines, as well as in flax, chia and hemp seeds. "If you don't eat fish, you may want to consider taking a fish oil supplement," advises Zuckerbrot, whose breakfast smoothie blends berries, chia seeds,

ground flax seeds and ice. "Blueberries and blackberries contain antioxidants that can reduce inflammation and aid in healing, chia seeds and ground flax seeds provide a boost of Omega-3 fatty acids, which have an anti-inflammatory effect on the body, and ice creates higher water content, which in the body takes healing nutrients to the cells where they're needed and removes waste products," she shares. Spices like cloves, ginger, rosemary and, of course, turmeric have also been proven to have anti-inflammatory effects on the body. The dietician also recommends sipping chamomile tea and snacking on pieces of pineapple in between meals, "Bromelain is an anti-inflammatory enzyme found in the core. The bromelain works best when pineapple is eaten separately from other foods." Thankfully, chronic inflammation is not a cause for concern for the vast majority of us. But, as supplements and yellow drinks continue to captivate, we can't help but wonder what colour our next juice will be. Inevitably, getting completely wrapped up in a hot health topic often holds little longevity or power in our everyday lives, but taking the type of diet recommended by both Miller and Zuckerbrot into account comes with common sense. The bottom line? Our health relies upon our own education and insight, so a little online guidance towards the dietary developments can always help us to move in the right direction.