

nutrition 101

Asthma

There is no one food or diet that will cure asthma, but there are eating patterns that may help to improve asthma symptoms, aid lung function and improve overall health.

One way to improve asthma symptoms is to maintain or reach a healthy weight. Adults who are overweight or obese may be less responsive to asthma treatment and may suffer from more chronic inflammation than adults who are at a healthy weight. Eating a healthy, well-balanced diet can help with weight control, potentially reducing inflammation in the body and improving asthma symptoms. Follow the tips below for ideas on how to eat for better asthma control.

MINIMIZE YOUR SYMPTOMS

Eat a well-balanced diet that includes:

- Fruits
- Lean protein
- Low-fat dairy foods
- Nuts and seeds
- Vegetables
- Whole grains

Choose colorful plant foods that are high in antioxidants. Antioxidants are nutrients that help protect healthy cells from damaging molecules called free radicals.

- Fruits: strawberries, blueberries, cherries, blackberries, raspberries
- Herbs and spices: dried or ground turmeric, ginger, cinnamon, and garlic
- Nuts and seeds: pecans, walnuts, almonds, peanuts
- Vegetables: spinach, kale, collard greens, broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, artichokes, red cabbage, beets

Include healthy fats (monounsaturated and omega-3) to help lower inflammation.

- Fatty fish: salmon, mackerel, tuna, sardines
- Fruit: avocado
- Nuts and seeds: almonds, walnuts, chia seeds, ground flaxseed
- Oils: extra virgin olive oil, walnut oil, flaxseed oil

Add fiber-rich foods to your plate to help lower inflammation and keep you full longer.

- Fruits
- Nuts and seeds
- Vegetables
- Whole grains
- Legumes and beans

Choose Vitamin D-rich foods. Vitamin D may be helpful in reducing airway inflammation and boosting the immune system. If considering a vitamin D supplement, talk with a pharmacist or registered dietitian for the dosage that may be right for you.

Foods with vitamin D include:

- Eggs
- Fish: salmon, trout, swordfish, mackerel
- Fortified breakfast cereals
- Fortified dairy products
- Fortified orange juice

Get enough vitamin E. Vitamin E is an antioxidant and may lower the risk of some asthma symptoms like wheezing or coughing. Vitamin E-rich foods include:

- Green leafy vegetables: Swiss chard, kale, mustard greens, broccoli
- Nuts: almonds, peanuts, hazelnuts
- Seeds: sunflower seeds
- Vegetable oils

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For some people, certain types of foods may make asthma symptoms worse. These types of foods include:

Sulfites

Sulfites are primarily used as preservatives in food and drinks, like dried fruit and shrimp. They also help to prevent microbial growth in fermented beverages, like wine. For a detailed list of sulfite-containing foods, see the *Avoiding Sulfites and Salicylates* handout.

Salicylates

Salicylates are naturally occurring chemicals found in many fruits and vegetables as well as several health and beauty products, like aspirin. For a detailed list of salicylate-containing products, see the *Avoiding Sulfites and Salicylates* handout.

Gas causing foods

Foods that cause gas or bloating may make breathing more difficult. Trouble breathing could cause chest tightness leading to asthma flares. Foods that produce gas include:

- Beans and legumes
- Carbonated beverages
- Cruciferous vegetables: broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower
- Fried foods
- Garlic
- Onions

Common Food Allergens

Those with asthma are at a higher risk for having food allergies. Food allergies can also cause asthma symptoms. When trying to determine foods that may worsen asthma symptoms, it may be wise to avoid allergy-triggering foods. Some of the most common food allergens are listed below. For a more detailed list, see the *Common Food Allergens* handout.

- Milk
- Eggs
- Fish
- Shellfish
- Peanuts
- Tree nuts
- Wheat
- Soy

Skip out on foods that may promote inflammation in the body.

- Alcohol
- Red meat
- Processed meats: hot dogs, bratwursts, sausages, highly-processed deli meats
- Refined grains: white flour-based products
- High-sodium foods: canned foods, pizza, pickles, deli meat, cheese, broths, soups
- High-sugar foods: sugar-sweetened beverages, desserts, cookies, candies, ice cream, cake