

Diet Changes to Help Reduce Inflammation and Symptoms of Lymphedema

What is Lymphedema and Inflammation?

Your lymphatic (lymph) system is an important part of your body's immune system. Your lymphatic system is made up of lymph vessels, lymph nodes and lymphatic tissue. Your lymph vessels work to move lymphatic fluid throughout your body. Lymphatic fluid carries white blood cells that help fight infection. Lymph nodes act as "filtering stations" to help your body fight off bacteria and viruses.

If any part of the lymphatic system is damaged, or missing, lymphatic fluid can start to collect in tissues and cause swelling. Lymphedema is a build-up of clear lymphatic fluid under your skin which causes swelling. The location and amount of swelling is different for each person. It is most often seen in one, or both of your arms or legs. This swelling can also be found in the breast, head, neck or genitals.

Research has shown that lymphedema also causes inflammation in the affected areas of your body. The inflammation caused by lymphedema may make the swelling worse and cause the soft tissue to grow and become more firm over time. Reducing the overall amount of inflammation in your body may help slow down this process and decrease some of your symptoms.

What is inflammation?

Inflammation is your body's immune response to something it feels is harmful. If inflammation remains for too long, it can cause damage to your healthy cells and tissues. Certain foods can help reduce systemic inflammation.

This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

Foods that can increase inflammation:	Foods that help reduce inflammation:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Added sugars • Refined grains • Processed foods • Saturated and trans fats • Refined oils • Alcohol 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meat • Seafood • Eggs • Vegetables • Fruit • Unsaturated fats

What foods should I eat to help reduce inflammation in my body?

- Eating more whole foods will provide antioxidants to prevent or reduce inflammation in your body. This would include foods such as fruits, vegetables, meat and seafood and all foods that do not have labels. These types of foods are normally found in aisles around the edges of the grocery store. Buying foods without labels means they have not been processed.
- Eat a variety of fruits and vegetables. These foods have phytochemicals and antioxidants and can help:
 - ▶ Reduce inflammation
 - ▶ Destroy abnormal cells
 - ▶ Strengthen your immune system
 - ▶ Slow or stop the growth of cancer
- Fruits and vegetables are also low in calories and a good source of vitamins and minerals. Try to include a rainbow of food colors in your diet, such as red, orange, yellow, green, purple, blue, white and brown.
- Limit the amount of refined sugars that you eat, such as white bread, white rice, white pasta, chips, candy bars, snack cakes, processed baked goods, fried foods, pop or sweet tea, frozen meals, boxed meals, juice and regular soda. These foods are often higher in fat and calories and lower in the nutrients your body needs. Added sugars and preservatives in these foods can increase the inflammation in your body.

- Eat more whole grains. Whole grains can be found in whole wheat bread, brown rice, whole wheat pasta, whole wheat crackers, oats, quinoa, barley, buckwheat, farro and millet. Refined grains are usually made with white flour, which is often stripped of its fiber, protein, vitamins and minerals. Whole grain products keep those important nutrients and offer anti-inflammatory benefits.
- Eat plenty of healthy protein foods, such as eggs, fish, lean cuts of meat or plant-based proteins such as beans, nuts, seeds and lentils. Lean proteins have lower amounts of saturated fats and plant-based sources have unsaturated fats which offer protective benefits.
- Choose healthy fats, such as olive oil, nuts, avocados, beans, hummus and Greek yogurt.
- Try to add more omega-3 fatty acids to your diet such as salmon, tuna, mackerel, nuts and seeds which can help reduce inflammation.

To learn more, ask for the patient education handout, [Anti-Inflammatory Diet](#).

For more information about healthy eating during and after cancer treatment, visit the [JamesCare for Life](#) website to learn about our nutrition programs and cooking classes.