

Choose Calmer Foods

Supporting the body through food without creating another set of rigid rules.

There is no single anti-inflammatory food

When inflammation is discussed online, foods are often divided into heroes and villains. The evidence is much less dramatic. No single ingredient can guarantee lower inflammation, just as one ordinary food does not automatically create chronic inflammation. What appears to matter more is the overall pattern of eating across time, together with sleep, movement, stress, smoking, alcohol, metabolic health and existing medical conditions.

Dietary patterns similar to a Mediterranean diet are among the most studied. They generally emphasise vegetables and fruit, pulses, whole grains, nuts and seeds, olive oil, herbs, fish and other appropriate protein sources, while keeping heavily processed foods and excess saturated fat lower. Research suggests these patterns may improve some inflammatory biomarkers and wider cardiovascular and metabolic health, although individual results vary.

Add before you subtract

One of the gentlest ways to improve a diet is to ask what can be added rather than immediately deciding what must disappear. Could a familiar meal include one tolerated vegetable? Could a breakfast gain some fibre? Could a safe snack include a protein source? Could olive oil, seeds or another suitable unsaturated fat be added where appropriate? Small additions can increase nutritional value without turning eating into a punishment.

This approach is especially useful when food already feels difficult. A long exclusion list may look 'healthy' on paper while leaving someone undernourished, anxious and unable to eat enough. Health includes adequacy. The body needs sufficient energy, protein, fats, vitamins, minerals and fluids as well as variety where variety is possible.

What might a calmer plate include?

There is no compulsory plate. For one person it might be lentils, vegetables, whole grains and olive oil. For another it might be a familiar carbohydrate with a tolerated protein and a smooth vegetable soup. Someone with sensory differences may need foods separated rather than mixed. Someone with allergies will need safe alternatives. The useful question is not 'Does my meal look perfect?' but 'Does this meal give my body something it needs, and can I actually eat it?'

Fibre is particularly important for gut and metabolic health, but increasing it suddenly can cause bloating or discomfort. If your current intake is low, gradual changes and adequate fluid may be more comfortable. Anyone with a gastrointestinal condition or specific dietary restriction may need individual guidance.

When 'healthy eating' becomes another pressure

Nutrition advice can accidentally become moral language: clean, dirty, good, bad, guilty, perfect. That language can make food emotionally exhausting. A calmer relationship with food allows nutritional information to exist without attaching personal worth to what was eaten. A convenience meal is not a character flaw. A safe food is not a failure. A day when you simply manage to eat still matters.

For ARFID and sensory-led eating

If your food range is limited because of texture, smell, taste, fear, nausea or sensory processing, start with safety. Changes may need to be tiny: a different brand, a slightly altered texture, a familiar food beside something new, or a fortified version of something already accepted. Sometimes the most health-supportive action is increasing reliable intake before trying to increase variety.

Food exposure should not be forced. Pressure can strengthen fear and avoidance. A dietitian or therapist with appropriate understanding of ARFID and neurodivergence can help build nutritional adequacy while respecting sensory and emotional safety.

A calmer-food check-in

What foods already feel safe and nourishing? What could I add rather than remove? Am I eating regularly enough? Do I need more fluids? Is my idea of a 'healthy plate' realistic for my body and circumstances? Is nutrition information helping me, or is it making eating more frightening? What is one small change I could repeat rather than one big change I cannot sustain?

A message from me

I want this to be about support, not another diet. Food can become a place where we are constantly told to improve ourselves, and for someone who already struggles to eat, that can be overwhelming. Start where you are. Use what is safe. Add what you can. Your plate does not have to look like anybody else's to count as nourishment.

Clinical note

This resource provides general educational information. Individual nutritional needs differ, and food allergies, gastrointestinal disease, diabetes, eating disorders, ARFID and other conditions may require tailored advice from an appropriate healthcare professional or registered dietitian.