

# The Hidden Link

How everyday foods can influence inflammation, fatigue and energy - without turning food into something to fear.

## Inflammation is not automatically the enemy

Inflammation is one of the body's normal protective responses. It helps us respond to infection, injury and repair. The difficulty comes when low-grade inflammation remains active over time. Food can be one influence on this wider picture, but it is rarely as simple as one ingredient causing inflammation or one 'superfood' curing it. Research is stronger for overall dietary patterns than for dramatic claims about individual foods.

Recent reviews of controlled trials have found that Mediterranean-style dietary patterns can reduce some inflammatory markers, although effects are not identical across every marker or every person. This matters because it moves the conversation away from blaming a single meal and towards the pattern we build over weeks and months: fibre, plant foods, fats, protein sources, food processing, regularity and nutritional adequacy.

## Why might I feel tired after eating?

Fatigue after food can feel convincing: you eat, your energy drops, and it is natural to connect the two. Sometimes there may be a genuine food-related reason, but fatigue is not a specific test for inflammation. Meal size, poor sleep, dehydration, blood-glucose changes, stress, medication, pain, illness, digestive symptoms, allergies and intolerances can all sit underneath the same experience. This is why a careful pattern is more useful than immediately labelling a food as 'bad'.

A useful starting point is to notice what happens repeatedly. What did you eat? How much? How quickly did symptoms begin? How had you slept? Were you already stressed or exhausted? Did the same response happen the next time? One difficult day is information, but it is not yet a conclusion.

## Look for patterns without creating fear

If you want to explore the connection between food and how your body feels, try a simple two-to-four-week check-in. Record meals alongside energy, digestion, pain or headaches, sleep quality and stress. Keep the language neutral: 'I noticed...' rather than 'this food is harmful'. The purpose is to collect clues. For someone who already finds eating difficult, restrictive or sensory-heavy, removing foods unnecessarily can make nutrition and anxiety worse.

Food allergy is different from food intolerance. Allergy can include hives, swelling, wheezing, breathlessness, vomiting, dizziness and other symptoms, and severe reactions can require urgent medical help. Persistent digestive symptoms, unexplained weight loss, blood in the stool, recurrent vomiting, difficulty swallowing or a rapidly narrowing food range should be discussed with an appropriate healthcare professional.

## What can support a calmer inflammatory pattern?

Think about what can be added before deciding what must be removed. Depending on your needs and tolerances, this may mean more fibre, vegetables or fruit, pulses, whole grains, nuts or seeds, olive oil, oily fish or another suitable protein source. It can also mean simply eating regularly enough, drinking enough and having foods available that you can actually tolerate. A nutritionally 'perfect' plan that cannot be eaten is not a useful plan.

For people with ARFID, sensory differences, allergies or a small safe-food range, the goal may look very different. A familiar fortified food, a smooth soup, an accepted carbohydrate, a tolerated protein or one small variation can be meaningful progress. Supporting health should not require someone to abandon safety around food. Personalisation is about the whole person, not just a score on an app.

## The body is more than the plate

Sleep, chronic stress, movement, smoking, alcohol, infection, metabolic health and existing medical conditions can all influence inflammatory processes. If every symptom is blamed on food, we can miss other important contributors. Sometimes the most useful change is not a stricter diet; it may be more sleep, regular meals, less pressure around eating, gentle movement, medical review or practical support.

## A check-in for you

**What do I genuinely notice after eating, and what am I assuming? Is the pattern repeated? What else was happening in my body or life that day? Is there something nourishing I can add before I remove anything? Is tracking helping me understand myself, or is it making me more frightened of food?**

## A message from me

Food can become another place where we feel we have failed: the right foods, the wrong foods, the perfect plate, the latest rule. I would rather we use information to make eating feel safer and more understandable. Your body deserves curiosity, not punishment. If something repeatedly does not feel right, notice it and seek support where needed - but you do not have to turn every meal into a test.

## Clinical note & sources

Evidence is strongest for dietary patterns rather than claims that a single everyday food directly causes chronic inflammation. Mediterranean-style patterns have shown reductions in some inflammatory biomarkers in systematic reviews and meta-analyses, but findings vary by marker and population. NHS guidance distinguishes food allergy from intolerance and advises medical help for serious allergic symptoms. This resource is educational and is not a diagnosis or substitute for individual medical or dietetic advice.