



# Ask a Nutritionist

by Tara Postnikoff

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**Q:** Are there any foods with anti-inflammatory benefits that can help ease runners' aches and pains?



**A:** Exercise creates inflammation in the body through the act of doing work and producing heat, as well as from absorbing the impact every time your foot strikes the ground. In moderate amounts, inflammation is a good thing, as it stimulates healthy immune responses in the body that actually make our cells stronger and more able to protect themselves. However, repeated long duration exercise coupled with other environmental and internal stressors can have the opposite effect and actually contribute to the breakdown of the body tissues.

In addition to proper post-workout recovery nutrition (remember the three Rs: rehydration, refuel and repair), you can incorporate foods on a daily basis that are rich in anti-inflammatory properties to help reduce exercise's oxidative stress on the body. Be cautious of overdoing post-workout antioxidants in supplement form, as studies have shown that this can inhibit the performance gains from training hard.

**Here are five anti-inflammatory foods that runners can add to their daily diet:**

## 1. Magnesium

Magnesium is a mineral responsible for muscle and nervous system relaxation. As runners, magnesium is one electrolyte you sweat out, so your need is higher than most. Magnesium-rich foods include dark green vegetables, Brazil nuts, almonds, pecans, avocado, brown rice, and millet. Adding these to your menu will reduce muscle soreness and help you sleep better.

## 2. Ginger

Ginger contains gingerols, which are potent anti-inflammatory compounds that assist with pain reduction in muscles and joints. Adding ginger to soup, a smoothie or a stir-fry gives a kick to your meal, or boil fresh ginger root in water for 10 minutes for an amazing tea.

## 3. Turmeric

Turmeric contains curcumin, an anti-inflammatory compound that also has pain-reducing effects. Use dried turmeric in your cooking and baking, or add a teaspoon to your next smoothie as a preventative measure.

## 4. Cold water fish oil

Cold water fish oil is rich in the omega-3 fatty acids EPA and DHA, and has been found to reduce inflammation and boost the immune system. Omega-3s help provide joint lubrication and shock absorption for your joints and tissues. Aim to eat at least three servings of cold water fish (salmon, herring, sardines, mackerel or tuna) per week, or consider a high-quality omega-3 supplement to help meet your needs. If you are vegetarian, you can opt for ground flax or chia seeds as a source of omega-3.

## 5. Pineapple

Pineapple contain bromelain, a potent anti-inflammatory phytonutrient that helps the body heal. Fresh pineapple works best, and can be easily added to a smoothie.

Pineapple can also be used as a digestive aid and is great for soothing an irritated throat.

Don't forget about proper hydration. Water is key to elimination of wastes, including inflammatory compounds. Conversely, a dehydrated state can often exacerbate inflammation within the body.

Avoiding certain foods is also critical in reducing inflammation. Foods that are allergens (or to which you have intolerances) should be avoided, as they increase inflammation and will aggravate the situation. Reducing your consumption of foods such as cheese, trans and hydrogenated fats, deep fried foods, alcohol, caffeine, sugar, and products containing artificial sweeteners can be helpful in reducing inflammation. **RR**