

ANTI-INFLAMMATORY NUTRITION AND CANCER



This factsheet was developed by the International Association of Fire Fighters and the Firefighter Cancer Support Network.

An anti-inflammatory diet may help reduce cancer risk. Because chronic inflammation is linked to the development and progression of cancer, targeting it can support both prevention and treatment efforts.¹

For fire fighters, anti-inflammatory nutrition can help reduce chronic inflammation, support recovery after exposures, strengthen the immune system, and contribute to long-term health.

WHAT IS AN ANTI-INFLAMMATORY DIET?

An anti-inflammatory diet is characterized by incorporating foods with potential anti-inflammatory properties, including fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, legumes, spices, herbs, and plant-based proteins while limiting the intake of foods with potential pro-inflammatory properties, such as red meat, refined carbohydrates, and alcohol.²

FOODS TO AVOID

- Processed meats like bacon, sausage, hot dogs, and deli meats
- Red meat
- Ultra-processed snacks like chips and pastries
- Refined carbs like white bread, sweets, and sugar sweetened drinks
- Alcohol
- Charred/smoked foods

FOODS TO INCLUDE

- Fruits and vegetables like berries, leafy greens, tomatoes, citrus, carrots, beets
- Whole grains and legumes like steel-cut oats, brown rice, quinoa, barley, black beans, chickpeas, lentils
- Fatty fish like salmon, mackerel, and trout
- Lean proteins like chicken and turkey breast

HOW CAN FIRE FIGHTERS INCORPORATE ANTI-INFLAMMATORY NUTRITION INTO THEIR LIVES?

AT THE STATION:

- Try to cook family-style anti-inflammatory meals that include lean proteins (e.g., chicken, salmon, beans), colorful vegetables, and whole grains
- Replace fried foods and processed meats with grilled or roasted options
- Swap unhealthy snacks, like chips and candy, with nuts, fruit, or cut veggies and hummus
- Choose water or green tea over soda and energy drinks

AT HOME:

- Prep and freeze anti-inflammatory meals to pack for long shifts
- When grocery shopping, stick to the perimeter of the store, selecting lean proteins, whole grains, healthy fats
- For recovery after shifts, focus on foods that fight oxidative stress like berries, leafy greens, salmon, turmeric dishes, and green tea

Anti-inflammatory nutrition can support your health on and off duty. While no individual food can reduce inflammation on its own, a consistent, healthy dietary pattern can help lower chronic inflammation and support cancer prevention for fire fighters.

¹ Singh, N., Baby, D., Rajguru, J. P., Patil, P. B., Thakkannavar, S. S., & Pujari, V. B. (2019). Inflammation and cancer. *Annals of African medicine*, 18(3), 121–126. https://doi.org/10.4103/aam.aam_56_18

² Yu, X., Pu, H., & Voss, M. (2024). Overview of anti-inflammatory diets and their promising effects on non-communicable diseases. *The British journal of nutrition*, 132(7), 898–918. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007114524001405>