

# THE HUFFINGTON POST

## **The 4 Foods That Are Aging You — And What To Eat Instead**

Make these food swaps for a healthier life.

While none of us can turn back the clock and prevent aging, it can be a much more pleasant experience if we make changes early on to prevent illnesses and deterioration. With that in mind, we spoke to internal medicine specialist [Erika Schwartz](#) — who has focused on preventive medicine for decades with her patients of all ages — about how our diet can affect the aging process.

“As you get older, inflammation becomes the biggest problem,” Schwartz said. “Inflammation creates aging

and disease. An anti-inflammatory diet is the way to beat it.”

Research has linked many chronic diseases like high blood pressure, diabetes and more to [inflammation](#). Simply put, [Inflammation](#) is your body’s response when your immune system is fighting off harmful things like certain bacteria and disease.

Read on below for Dr. Schwartz’s recommendations of four foods to avoid and four foods to incorporate into your diet.

## **Avoid: Alcohol**

Your body might have been able to handle knocking back a few drinks when you were younger but as we get older, our bodies can’t handle alcohol as well. According to the [NIH](#), your sensitivity to alcohol can increase with age, thanks to lower levels of water in the body. Schwartz says for older people, alcohol is akin to “pure poison.” As we get older, she explains, our liver’s ability to detoxify diminishes and alcohol only worsens that. [Alcohol](#) is also known to dehydrate the skin, so you might not look so pleasant the morning after you’ve had a few too many. If cutting it out altogether seems like too much, it’s certainly beneficial to start by cutting back.

Instead, try water with lemon. Starting your day with a glass of water and lemon can have numerous benefits. It can aid with digestion, which sometimes slows down as we get older. It helps you get hydrated first thing in the

morning. Also, lemons contain vitamin C and [antioxidants](#) that can help protect your cells from damage.

## **Avoid: Processed foods**

Healthy, “whole foods” like vegetables, fruits, and eggs, etc. are easier for the body to process and derive nutrients from, Schwartz says. With packaged, processed foods, your body doesn’t always know how to process them, especially when they contain ingredients that are added just to increase shelf-life but don’t have any nutrition value. Watch out especially for foods that are deep fried and high in trans and saturated fats as these can increase [inflammation](#) — that thing we’re trying to avoid. Many processed foods are also laden with sugar, meaning extra calories and more inflammation. Eating refined [carbohydrates](#) creates a spike in blood sugar, creating more inflammation throughout your body.

Instead, opt for healthy fats like avocados. They can improve your cholesterol, keep you feeling full with their fiber content and contain [antioxidants](#). They’re also rich in carotenoids, which help to fight [inflammation](#).

## **Avoid: Sugar substitutes**

While it’s a good idea to limit your sugars, don’t think that means it’s time to reach for the sugar substitutes. These are artificial sweeteners, which are often found in foods touted as “sugar-free.” Schwartz says our bodies don’t know how to break down these chemicals and

often they can cause unpleasant side effects when taken in large amounts that may include bloating, gas and a laxative effect. Another downside is that they are often much sweeter than sugar itself, meaning if you get too used to them, it might be difficult to switch back without using more sugar. Schwartz calls artificial sweeteners “toxins” that can cause inflammation in some people.

If you want to satisfy your sweet tooth, you might try yogurt and fruit, as yogurt is high in calcium, which helps prevent osteoporosis. Fruit, of course, is full of vitamin C and antioxidants.

## **Avoid: Dairy**

Your lactase levels can drop with age, causing a degree of lactose intolerance. Lactase is the enzyme that helps your body digest dairy products. Intolerance can lead to inflammation.

Instead, eat more leafy green vegetables. Schwartz says these dark leafy greens are the perfect package of vitamins, nutrients and anti-inflammatory compounds. (P.S. If you're cutting back on dairy, leafy greens are a good source of calcium.) These are also rich in antioxidants, which again, fight cell damage.