



KITCHEN CURES
For Any Ache



foods

THAT

FIGHT PAIN

Science is starting to recognise that foods can relieve pain as well as—or even better than—drugs.

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While pain pills reduce suffering, they can be addictive and produce side-effects. Worse, they often fail to eliminate the true cause of the pain. "No matter how well you prescribe medication, chronic sufferers don't get complete relief," observes James N Dillard, MD, author of *The Chronic Pain Solution*.

But there is an alternative, and it's right in your kitchen. Certain foods ease aches by fighting inflammation, blocking pain signals and even healing underlying disease. "Almost always, if we find pharmaceuticals doing the trick, we'll find a plant doing the same trick—and doing it more safely," says botanist James A Duke, PhD,

author of *The Green Pharmacy Guide to Healing Foods*.

But before you can reap these rewards, you have to quit the junk food that riles up your body's pain system. The typical Western-style diet is heavy on foods that promote inflammation, including highly processed foods and refined carbs. No fruit, vegetable or herb by itself can alleviate your pain if you don't change the pattern of your diet to reduce processed food and increase whole foods. This may not be easy, says Peter Abaci, MD, medical director of the Bay Area Pain and Wellness Center in Los Gatos, California. "But if you stay committed to a good nutrition plan, you may be able to say goodbye to pain."

THE RX: yoghurt

THE TARGET: BS

THE DOSE: one or two cups daily

"For about 40% of Indians who have irritable bowel syndrome, stomach pain is a given," says Dr Khurshed Vazifdar, gastroenterologist, Kohinoor hospital, Mumbai. But help may come in the form of a bug—billions of bugs, actually. Yoghurt may contain a wide variety of bacteria like *Lactobacillus*

acidophilus, *Lactococcus lactis*, *Lactococcus lactis cremoris*, *B.lactis*, among others and they reduce pain, inflammation and bloating. The bacterial strains in homemade yoghurt may differ from home to home, though. You can also choose from an increasing number of probiotic yoghurts and drinks in the market. Skip the fruity flavours, which can contain several packets of sugar. Instead mix fresh fruit in unflavoured yoghurt.



THE RX: turmeric

THE TARGET: Achy joints, colitis (inflammation of the colon)

THE DOSE: A third of a teaspoon daily

This essential Indian spice has been used for years in Ayurvedic medicine to relieve pain and speed up digestion. Researchers like it for another reason: its anti-inflammatory properties,

courtesy a substance called curcumin.

"Turmeric can protect the body from tissue destruction and joint inflammation and also preserve good nerve cell function," Abaci says. "A typical Indian meal easily accommodates the recommended daily dose of 1-2 g of turmeric," says Jamuna Prakash, professor, Food Science and Nutrition, University of Mysore. A little extra

doesn't hurt though.

Add some to your roti dough, dosa/idli batter besides the curries and dry veggies. Fresh turmeric root can be used pickled with vinegar. Note: when you cook with turmeric, use the pepper mill. "Turmeric and black pepper should always go together," says Dillard. "The piperine in black pepper helps release curcumin from the spice."

Sprinkle turmeric on salad dressings, soups, cooked grains and vegetables.



OPENING LEFT: ILLUSTRATION/SHUTTERSTOCK/MIKHAIL PICTURE

THE RX: mackerel (bangda), tuna raawas

THE TARGET: Achy back, neck, joints

THE DOSE: Two to three 30 g servings weekly

Eating fish low in mercury and high in Omega-3 fatty acids can help relieve back pain. In a healthy back, blood vessels at the edge of the spinal discs transport crucial nutrients to those discs. If blood flow is diminished, the discs lose their source of oxygen and other nutrients, and they begin to degenerate, says Neal D Barnard, MD, author of *Foods That Fight Pain*. Omega-3s help by improving blood flow and tamping down inflammation in blood vessels and nerves.

But for the full effect, you may need supplements. One study published in the journal *Surgical Neurology* found that taking 1,200 mg or more of EPA and DHA per day could reduce both back and neck pain. And there are added bonuses: "Any amount of fish oil is beneficial for cardiovascular protection and

mood elevation," says Joseph C Maroon, MD, the study's lead researcher. A study in the journal *Pain* found that people are more aware of their discomfort when they're glum.

"Flaxseeds and walnuts can meet a

vegetarian's requirement of Omega-3 fatty acids," says Swati Dhingra, research dietician at Tata Memorial Centre, Mumbai. One tablespoon of ground flaxseeds and ¼ cup (8-10 pieces) of walnuts every day should do the job.

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Green tea relieves headache through vasoconstriction (narrowing down blood vessels).

THE RX: herbal teas

THE TARGET: Headaches

THE DOSE: As many as 3 cups a day

Studies show that teas such as green and chamomile have calming properties. "Green tea is full of anti-oxidants and has moderate amounts of caffeine," says Ritika Samaddar, regional head, dietetics, Max Healthcare, New Delhi. A 150 ml cup of green tea contains about 8 to 36 mg of caffeine as opposed to 106 to 164 mg in filter coffee. The caffeine in green tea relieves headache through vasoconstriction. It narrows down blood vessels that begin to dilate at the onset of a headache. However people with special therapeutic needs, such as pregnant and anaemic women, should take tea only under supervision since the tannins in tea inhibit

absorption of essential nutrients. Coffee seems to help but too much of it can have the opposite effect. When you quit, you can get withdrawal headaches.



SHUTTERSTOCK/IMPACTURE

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