

Health and Lupus

By Regan Birr

With lupus, you *can* have your health.

We are here to make a difference in your life. Not just in terms of fundraising to find a cure, but also to help you cope, learn to live better, thrive, and then sustain your health in this journey, until a cure is found.

Reducing inflammation is *key* in reducing pain with lupus. It has been supported by doctors that controlling inflammation not only helps reduce exacerbation of your inflammatory disease, but also helps control pain levels, and this control of inflammation can be achieved by use of food.

One such doctor is Dr. Rekha Mankad, cardiologist, in Rochester, Minnesota at the Mayo Clinic, the number-one ranked hospital in the United States. Thanks to the ambition and vision of Dr. Mankad, the Mayo clinic now boasts the first Cardio-Rheumatology Clinic, and she is its director. Dr. Mankad's specialty is the relationship between autoimmune diseases and coronary artery disease.

Here's the scoop.

We've known for years now that there is a link between sugar and inflammation. We may have heard it in the background, we may have thought about it, but we may not have really paid attention. Well, now it is becoming more understood, more supported, and more mainstream. It is talked about in doctor's offices. This is due to increased research, and findings which support the concept and increase our understanding of why this is. So we need to take it seriously. Here's what you need to know:

There are two key concepts you should know:

There is a **proportional relationship between food and inflammation**. This means there is a **direct impact of what you eat on your inflammation**.

There is also a **proportional relationship between inflammation and pain**. This means that **your level of inflammation can be directly related to your pain**.

Therefore, it can be said that:

WHAT YOU EAT IMPACTS YOUR PAIN

And more importantly:

WHAT YOU EAT IMPACTS YOUR HEALTH

Did you know that the walls of your arteries are greatly affected by inflammation? It may not be cholesterol or plaque that leads to heart disease. Especially for lupus patients, **inflammation** is the Number One cause of heart disease.

Why does this particularly matter? Dr. Mankad explains that it matters because we have an inflammatory condition. We already have an underlying level of inflammation by virtue of having lupus. Add on top of that the use of steroids, which brings its own risk of cardiovascular disease, and you've got a concern.

Fact: people with systemic lupus are 9-50 times MORE AT RISK than the general population of having a myocardial infarction. And, they have a high cardiovascular mortality. Lupus is now considered to be an independent risk factor for the development of atherosclerosis. Viewing atherosclerosis as an inflammatory disease, this association becomes stronger and better understood. See: [Cardiovascular Disease in Systemic Lupus Erythematosus: The Role of Traditional and Lupus Related Risk Factors: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2779351/](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2779351/) (second paragraph of the Introduction).

Here is another reference saying that inflammation is linked to atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries), a cause of heart disease and stroke. And that fat tissues also increase insulin resistance, leading to type 2 diabetes. See: "The G.I Diet" by Gallop (p. 135).

So, we need to take extra care in controlling our inflammation. Plus, we'll *feel better* if we do.

OK. SO HOW DO WE DO THAT?

CONTROL YOUR BLOOD SUGAR.

Why?

Remember what we said about inflammation and food? The foods we eat have a direct effect on our blood sugar levels. Each time we put food into our mouths, we increase our blood sugar. As our blood sugar spikes, so does our level of cellular inflammation. See: [Recent Advances In The Relationship Between Obesity, Inflammation, and Insulin Resistance: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/16613757](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/16613757). See also: [Hyperglycemia-Induced Production of Acute Phase Reactants in Adipose Tissue: http://www.jbc.org/content/276/45/42077.abstract](http://www.jbc.org/content/276/45/42077.abstract).

Again, cellular inflammation can translate into pain.

By reducing these spikes in blood sugar, we stabilize our blood sugar levels and our pain levels throughout the day. Not only does this help reduce the inflammation and therefore reduce our pain, it also stabilizes our energy levels during the day.

An anti-inflammatory diet can help reduce intensity and frequency of pain AND highs and lows of energy.

SO THE GOAL IS TO MITIGATE BLOOD SUGAR SPIKES

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE DO THAT?

Visualize this: as the spikes in blood sugar stop looking like steep mountains on a graph and more like gentle hills, cellular inflammation is reduced. As the combination of sugar spikes with “sugar crashes” stops looking like steep mountains next to deep rivers and starts looking more like gentle hills next to shallow valleys, our energy levels stop bouncing from super-high to super-low and they instead *normalize*. Wouldn't you loooooove to stop that “I-need to put my head down on the desk and sleep at 2:00” feeling every single day at work? Wouldn't you love to reduce your pain? It can happen. You can do it.

Deeper background

As we have discussed, there is a process by which inflammation can be reduced through how and what we eat.

Special note: it's not only sugar that can cause inflammation, but saturated fats, trans fats, excess omega-6 fatty acids such as sunflower, soy, and peanut oil, refined carbohydrates (these include those high GI foods we've been talking about), MSG, gluten and casein, aspartame, and alcohol. We believe in “everything in moderation”, but these are things we should consider reducing or getting rid of.

Replace such foods with WHOLE foods, vegetables, fruits, and non-processed meats like canned salmon.

Common sense should prevail.

Some experts say that it is acid-forming foods (the opposite of alkaline foods) that cause inflammation, and sugar and these other foods fall under that category. So we should be keeping that in mind, too.

Here's how it worked for me and many others, and why it is applicable to chronic conditions including arthritis, MS, Parkinson's, chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia, Diabetes, and lupus.

Common to all autoimmune diseases is inflammation, says Dr. David Roth, director of clinical development at Glaxo SmithKline, the co-developers of Benlysta. Auto-immune disease, in all of its forms, including lupus, multiple sclerosis and rheumatoid arthritis, is an inflammatory condition. An acceptable amount of autoreaction within the body is normal. But autoimmune patients have too many, long-living autoreactive cells (or “antibodies”), which means our body attacks itself. And when the body attacks itself, inflammation, on a cellular and macro level, occurs. That's why we have so much more inflammation than the average person.

Since diet can help reduce inflammation, diet can help people with chronic conditions feel better.

Decreasing inflammatory foods can be helpful for (and preventative of) other conditions as well including diabetes and heart disease. Eating a low-sugar diet can help greatly contribute to a reduction in blood cholesterol levels. When I began my anti-inflammatory diet, my cholesterol levels decreased by

a third. Of course, lowering one's blood sugar levels can also significantly impact weight loss, another benefit.

Inflammation in the skin can be seen in the form of acne, redness and swelling. Many chronic diseases involve inflammation. However, the inflammation in chronic disease is often cellular - not seen by the naked eye. See: Cellular Inflammation: <http://www.inflammationresearchfoundation.org>. So we need to be extra diligent, to control even that which we can't see.

So let's tackle the job of eating a low sugar, anti-inflammatory diet. *LET'S DO THIS!*

HOW DO WE KEEP OUR BLOOD SUGAR UNDER CONTROL? HOW DO WE CREATE AN ANTI-INFLAMMATORY DIET?

YOU'RE GOING TO GET VERY FAMILIAR WITH THE GLYCEMIC INDEX CHART

You'll get so familiar with this you'll learn by heart glycemic index (GI) value of every food you eat. Remember, the pay-off is huge.

FOR HOW LONG? It is recommended that you eat low to medium GI foods for 30 days.

THIS WILL GET YOU FEELING BETTER, AND WILL CHANGE YOUR LIFE.

COMMIT!

EXAMPLE OF A GLYCEMIC INDEX CHART:

LOW (<=55)		MODERATE (56-69)		HIGH (>=70)	
FOOD	GI	FOOD	GI	FOOD	GI
Peanuts	14	Apple juice	40	Life savers	70
Yogurt	14	Snickers	41	White bread	70
Soy beans	18	Peach	42	bagel	72
Peas	22	Carrots	47	Watermelon	72
Cherries	22	Brown rice	50	Popcorn	72
Barley	25	Strawberry jam	51	Graham crackers	74
Grapefruit	25	Power bar	53	French fries	75
Link sausage	28	Orange juice	53	Grape-Nuts	75
Black beans	30	Honey	55	Shredded Wheat	75
Lentils	30	Pita bread	57	Gatorade	78
Skim milk	32	Oatmeal – plain	58	Corn flakes	81
Fettuccini	32	Pineapple	59	Rice cakes	82
Chick peas	33	Sweet potato	61	Pretzels	83
Chocolate milk	32	Coca-Cola	63	Baked white potato	85
Whole wheat spaghetti	37	Raisins	64	Instant rice	87
Apple	38	Cantaloupe	65	Gluten-free bread	90
Pinto beans	39	Whole-wheat bread	67	Dates	103

NOW, WE DON'T WANT TO LEAVE YOU HANGING, GIVING YOU A FEW NUMBERS ON A CHART AND SOME DIRECTIONS. WE WANT TO MAKE THIS REAL-LIFE-EASY FOR YOU. SO HERE ARE SOME HEALTHY ALTERNATIVES THAT YOU SHOULD PICK UP IN YOUR GROCERY STORE AND TRY:

EAT THIS, NOT THAT:

WE DON'T BELIEVE IN ELIMINATING FOOD, WE BELIEVE IN REPLACING IT:

-If you can't live without white, or even wheat bread (even whole grain bread can be high on the glycemic index chart), eat rye bread and rye crackers. Delish!

-If you love rice: replace it with Quinoa and Barley. At the very least, replace white rice with brown.

-If you love pasta: replace it with Brown rice pasta.

-If you'll go crazy without white sugar: use agave! Agave is not necessarily "low" on the glycemic index chart, so use it with care, but it is lower than sugar.

Artificial sweeteners come with their own set of problems, and agave is a great alternative, so we don't see a need for the fake stuff.

-If you'd go nutty without peanut butter: eat it anyway - just don't buy roasted - and make sure it is "natural", made with raw almonds. Almond butter is a delicious alternative.

-Use turkey to replace red meat. The fats within red meat can increase blood cholesterol. Buffalo meat is also a wonderful alternative to red meat. And of course there's fish. SUPER GOOD for reducing inflammation and giving us a healthy dose of those Omega-3s!

-If you have to have oil - the healthy oils are beneficial and can help reduce inflammation - Olive, sunflower, and grape seed.

-If you must have butter - reduce it by a third, or eliminate it, and see above point!

-If you need your carbs: lentils, a starchy food, are filling, and can give us that carb "fix".

-If you like your potatoes: Sweet potatoes are lower on the glycemic index chart than are white potatoes. As are yams. And don't forget root vegetables – turnips can be a wonderful source of vitamins and fiber!

-If you need some spice: blueberries and cinnamon add a wonderful aspect to your morning bowl of oatmeal.

We recommend eating oatmeal over typical breakfast cereals. Oatmeal can help reduce cholesterol and is a low-GI food! Buy steel-cut if you like, which is even lower on the glycemic index chart than quick-oatmeal. And avoid those sugary cereal starch traps.

Eggs: gotta have it. They are a wonderful source of protein, and since food cholesterol does not contribute to blood cholesterol, an egg a day keeps the doctor away!

We also have read that eating protein with every meal helps absorb the food you eat, and helps maintain blood sugar levels throughout the day.

We've all heard it: eat 5 to 6 small meals a day to continually maintain blood sugar levels.

EASY!

AND OF COURSE, RUN THIS AND ALL DIET AND EXERCISE PROGRAMS YOU PERFORM BY YOUR DOCTOR.

HERE'S THE GOOD NEWS:

Reducing the sugar in your diet will also make a huge difference in increasing your energy, the *second* piece of a "**Health with Lupus**" lifestyle:

Having more energy and less pain will allow you to exercise.

It's hard to exercise when you're in pain. So we do it in a smart way. It's worth it: long-term effects of moderate exercise are shown to create a reduction in inflammation.

SMART METHOD:

THERE IS MORE TO IT THAN THIS – BUT, TO GET YOU STARTED, THE BASIC GIST IS TO REDUCE PRESSURE POINTS ON YOUR JOINTS BY KEEPING THE WEIGHTS OVER OR NEAR THE JOINT THAT HURTS.

You've all held a water bottle at arm's length, right? Feel how it reduces the "force" on your joint when you bend your arm, bringing the water bottle close to your body?

This is the way to perform exercise. And remember, "weights" can include body weight to start. Then move up in terms of what you can tolerate. Try starting with small tuna cans (five ounces), then graduate up to 2-pound weights. That's all you need!

This will help you prevent injury and create a *sustainable* program you can do for life.

Call us, we can help.

Other wonderful things will happen once your pain goes down. Stress and anxiety will decrease too, and sleep and ability to tackle the world will skyrocket.

You deserve to take care of yourself.

This journey is about you. Bring out your personal power.

Summary: eating right (and exercising in a manner appropriate specifically for you) can help reduce inflammation. It can empower you with skills to protect your body from the overproduction of auto-reactive, or "auto", antibodies. Reducing the number of auto-antibodies can result in decreased inflammation, which can directly decrease pain that is often associated with inflammation.

In fact, following these dietary recommendations is a good idea for everyone, including those without chronic conditions. These methods have been shown to increase energy and decrease pain as shown in the references provided. Following these methods can also contribute to weight loss, optimizing your exercise routine.

Additional References:

Examination of the relationship between sugar and inflammation: Consumption of refined carbohydrate by patients with Crohn's disease in Tel-Aviv-Yafo:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/7267494?dopt=Abstract>

Exploration of the relationship between foods and reduction of inflammation and pain: 17 Science-Based Benefits of Omega-3 Fatty Acids: <https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/17-health-benefits-of-omega-3>

Chronic inflammatory nature of lupus and the relationship between inflammation and pain: How lupus affects the muscles, tendons and joints: <https://resources.lupus.org/entry/joints-muscle-pain-in-lupus>

As inflammation within the body decreases, the symptoms that can be associated with inflammation, including pain, can also decrease. A must-read is the link between inflammation, pain, and chronic disease: see: Inflammation, pain, and chronic disease: an integrative approach to treatment and prevention: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/16320856>.