



KARYN SHANKS MD

*Heart, Hope, Healing*

# Wise Use of Supplements for Inflammation

BY KARYN SHANKS MD | NOVEMBER 23, 2016



## Don't just supplement to treat inflammation-get to the root cause!

Consider the root causes of your inflammation symptoms before reaching for another supplement. No matter how natural or powerful your favorite supplements are, if you don't consider *why* you are hurting, aching, and tired you're missing an opportunity to discover deep sustainable ways to improve your health.

I routinely use food and nutritional supplements to tackle troublesome symptoms for my clients, myself, and my family and the results can be profound. But we must take care not to just treat symptoms. True healing is about digging deep to discover the root causes of our symptoms.

While it's wonderful to have powerful options from nature to treat our aches and pains without the toxicities and side effects of common drugs, we don't want to merely substitute "green" medicine for drug-based symptom-oriented medicine. Whether choosing synthetic or natural approaches it is smart and always more sustainable to first understand the basis of what we are trying to treat.

## Getting to the Root Cause of Inflammation

If you are suffering from signs of persistent systemic inflammation like joint pain, muscle soreness and stiffness, headaches, fatigue, skin rashes, or gut upset—it would be good to first explore the underlying causes before reaching for the popular remedies—natural or otherwise. As a Functional Medicine-inspired doctor, my job is to explore all of the possible causes of systemic inflammation that make sense for your unique health story. In addition to evaluating all of the elements of your story and doing a physical exam, we would most likely do a battery of tests to search for potential triggers and mediators of your symptoms that will help guide our treatment approach. These tests may include a vitamin D level, thyroid testing, inflammation markers like CRP, ESR, ANA, or TGF-1B, tests for chronic infection like Lyme disease, and possibly stool and nutritional testing. Your Functional Medicine-savvy practitioner will know how to help you choose the tests that you need.

Once you understand what is going on, work to address the root causes of your symptoms. This may mean you will need to eliminate foods from your diet that you are sensitive to, treat a persistent infection, correct nutrient deficiencies, support detoxification, or change lifestyle factors like sleep, movement, and how you manage stress. In addition to root-cause interventions, by all means work with the power of nature to reduce inflammation and help relieve troublesome symptoms.

## My Favorite Anti-inflammatory Foods and Supplements

Here are some of the powerhouse plant-derived anti-inflammatory foods and supplements that I love to use, including their starting doses and possible side effects to watch out for:



**Turmeric root:** Tried and true for the treatment of arthritis pain, and a wide variety of symptoms related to inflammation. Use fresh whole or powdered: 1-2 teaspoons per day; or an extract of the powerful polyphenol, curcumin: 3-5 grams per day of curcumin capsules. **Possible side effects:** stomach upset, nausea, diarrhea, rare allergic skin rash.

**Ginger root:** Contains potent anti-inflammatory compounds called gingerols, with excellent arthritis pain-relieving properties. Ginger is also an effective treatment for nausea and gastrointestinal irritability. Use fresh whole or powdered: ½-1 teaspoons daily; or capsules: 2 twice daily. **Possible side effects:** stomach upset, diarrhea, increased bleeding tendency.

**EPA-DHA:** derived from fish oil or fatty fish, such as wild-caught salmon, or pasture-raised beef. This anti-inflammatory fat works on some of the same inflammation-relieving pathways as many potent drugs, but without the toxicities. It can also be taken as a supplement. I recommend a trial of 3-5 grams per day in divided doses, taken with food, for 3-4 months for most inflammatory conditions. The food options may be good alternatives if consumed daily. **Possible side effects:** gut upset, diarrhea, increased bleeding tendency, easy bruising.

**GLA (gamma linolenic acid):** derived from borage seed oil and evening primrose oil, this omega-6 fatty acid is potentially anti-inflammatory and a powerful adjunct to the omega-3 fats for reducing inflammation and its symptoms. Take it in capsule form: 200-400 mg per day. **Possible side effects:** gut upset and diarrhea.

**Resveratrol:** a powerful polyphenol derived from berries, the skin of red grapes, and red wine, and as an extract from the Japanese knotweed plant—also known as polygonum. If drinking red wine fits into your wise health plan, drink 4-6 ounces with your evening meal. In capsule form, take 200 mg trans-resveratrol daily. **Possible side effects:** rare allergies to food sources.

**Green Tea:** the catechins of green tea are profoundly anti-inflammatory and have a wide variety of health applications for calming the symptoms of chronic infections, autoimmune disorders, cancers, vascular disease, and diabetes. I prefer Sencha ground green tea for its extraordinary nutrient content (compared to leaf tea used in tea bags or matcha). Use ½-1 teaspoon daily in hot water, smoothies, or mixed into most anything. **Possible side effects:** stomach upset.

### **Turmeric-Ginger Coconut Milk Smoothie:**

<http://karynshanksmd.com/2016/09/10/healing-foods-turmeric/>

*You will need:*

1-cup full-fatted organic canned coconut milk

1-teaspoon turmeric

½ teaspoon ground or fresh ginger

¼ teaspoon black pepper

Whisk ingredients together in small sauce pan and heat until just barely to a boil, then simmer for just a couple of minutes. Pour it out and sip hot or let cool until just warm. If you use fresh ginger, strain before drinking.

This is a delicious tonic that can be used to treat inflammation. The black pepper helps with absorption of the curcuminoids in the turmeric and the coconut milk is rich in medium-chain triglycerides that have rich health benefits.

## KARYN SHANKS MD

Karyn Shanks, MD, is a physician who lives and practices in Iowa City. Her work is inspired by the science of Functional Medicine, body-mind principles, and wisdom gleaned from the transformational journeys of thousands of clients over her twenty-five-year career. Her work honors each individual and the power of their stories, their inner wisdom, and innate healing potential. She believes that the bones of healing are in what we do for ourselves. She is the author of *Liftoff*, a manual of energy recovery and healing through essential self-care practices.

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