

<https://mcpress.mayoclinic.org/healthy-eating/chronic-inflammation-what-it-is-why-its-bad-and-how-you-can-reduce-it/>

## Excerpt

### Chronic inflammation symptoms and causes

It's not easy to pinpoint the causes of chronic inflammation. Some experts think that it occurs when the [immune system goes awry](#). Sometimes, an ongoing infection or exposure to environmental triggers such as pollution can cause it. Obesity, eating a diet that isn't healthy, smoking, sleep problems and high stress levels likely play a part.

Chronic inflammation often progresses silently. When symptoms do occur, they can include:

- [Persistent fatigue](#).
- [Difficulty sleeping](#).
- [Joint or muscle pains](#).
- [Mental health conditions](#), such as [depression](#) or [anxiety](#).
- [Constipation](#), [diarrhea](#) or [acid reflux](#).
- Weight loss or weight gain.
- Repeated infections.

Still, symptoms aren't a surefire way to tell if you're experiencing chronic inflammation. If your healthcare professional suspects that inflammation is causing your symptoms, a blood test such as [erythrocyte sedimentation rate](#) or [C-reactive protein](#) may be recommended. These tests can identify inflammation in the body, but they don't determine the cause of it.

### The many health complications of chronic inflammation

Chronic inflammation contributes to diseases that together represent the leading causes of death around the world, such as type 2 diabetes, [cancer](#) and [cardiovascular diseases](#). It's also been linked to imbalances in the [gut microbiome](#) — a collection of [microorganisms living in the gut that help maintain good digestive and overall health](#).

**Heart disease.** When tobacco smoke or [high blood pressure](#) injures a coronary artery, the damage triggers an inflammatory process as the immune system tries to heal the injury. However, this inflammation can continue beyond the healing process and damage the lining of the arteries. Inflammation also influences the buildup of plaque in the arteries and [blood clot](#) formation, two factors behind [heart attacks](#) and certain types of stroke.

**Type 2 diabetes.** Researchers have found that people who have type 2 diabetes also have fat tissue containing elevated levels of cytokines. Cytokines are molecules that help your body fight off infections. But having too many of them and having the wrong type can overwhelm the body and increase inflammation. In addition, chronic inflammation can contribute to excess body fat, creating a vicious cycle of weight gain, inflammation and [blood sugar issues](#). These conditions increase the risk of type 2 diabetes.

**Cancer.** Research shows that long-term, low-level inflammation contributes to some types of cancer. For example, colorectal cancer may be more likely to develop because of chronic intestinal inflammation in people with inflammatory bowel disease (IBD). Viral hepatitis is an infection that causes [liver](#) inflammation and damage that can lead to liver cancer.

**Gut microbiome imbalance.** Most of the time, the body has a proper balance of helpful and potentially harmful microorganisms living in the gut. This balance is crucial because these microorganisms help maintain a [healthy digestive system and overall well-being](#). But sometimes the balance of microbes is disrupted, causing a reduction in helpful bacteria and an increase in potentially harmful bacteria — such as the bacterium *Helicobacter pylori* (*H. pylori*), *a risk factor for [stomach cancer](#)*. Researchers think an imbalance occurs for a number of reasons, including chronic inflammation. In turn, the imbalance may trigger additional inflammation that is linked to a host of diseases, including [inflammatory bowel diseases](#) such as [Crohn's disease](#) and [ulcerative colitis](#).