

# The Pain Plate Pyramid

## What's on your plate is in your body's pain signal.

### Top Tier — High Pain Foods

#### "The Inflammation Drivers"

*These foods silently fuel the fire.*

These foods trigger systemic inflammation by disrupting your gut lining, spiking inflammatory cytokines, feeding harmful gut bacteria, and destabilising blood sugar, all of which amplify pain signals throughout your body.

| Food                                                             | Why it drives pain                                                                                                             |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Ultra-processed foods</b> (chips, packaged snacks, fast food) | Packed with additives, emulsifiers and seed oils that destroy the gut lining and trigger immune response                       |
| <b>Refined sugar</b> (soft drinks, lollies, baked goods, sauces) | Spikes blood glucose, feeds inflammatory gut bacteria, suppresses immune function within hours of eating                       |
| <b>Dairy</b> (milk, cheese, cream, ice cream)                    | Casein protein triggers inflammatory response in many people; worsens mucus, joint swelling and bloating                       |
| <b>Gluten</b> (bread, pasta, pastry, cereals)                    | In sensitive people, gluten causes intestinal permeability ("leaky gut"), allowing inflammatory particles into the bloodstream |
| <b>Alcohol</b>                                                   | Destroys beneficial gut bacteria, inflames the gut lining, disrupts sleep and liver function, all key pain amplifiers          |
| <b>Refined seed oils</b> (canola, sunflower, vegetable oil)      | Extremely high in omega-6 fatty acids which tip the body into a pro-inflammatory state                                         |
| <b>Processed meats</b> (salami, sausages, deli meats)            | Nitrates, preservatives and saturated fats drive gut dysbiosis and systemic inflammation                                       |
| <b>Artificial sweeteners</b>                                     | Alter gut microbiome composition, reducing diversity and feeding inflammatory bacterial strains                                |
| <b>Caffeine</b> (excess)                                         | Elevates cortisol, disrupts sleep architecture, and dehydrates, all of which worsen pain sensitivity                           |
| <b>Trans fats</b> (margarine, commercial baked goods)            | Directly damage cell membranes and trigger inflammatory markers, linked to higher chronic pain scores                          |

# The Pain Plate Pyramid

What's on your plate is in your body's pain signal.

## Middle Tier — Low Pain Foods "Proceed With Awareness"

*These foods aren't the enemy, but they're not neutral for everyone.*

These foods are generally well-tolerated but can trigger individual inflammatory responses depending on your gut health, genetics, and existing conditions. Pay close attention to how your body responds in the 24–48 hours after eating them.

| Food                                                      | Why it's in the middle                                                                                                                     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Eggs</b>                                               | Excellent protein and anti-inflammatory fats for most, but an inflammatory trigger for some with gut permeability or autoimmune conditions |
| <b>Lean poultry</b> (chicken, turkey)                     | Clean protein source, but factory-farmed versions contain antibiotics that disrupt gut bacteria                                            |
| <b>Brown rice &amp; quinoa</b>                            | Whole grain carbohydrates that are generally low-inflammatory but can cause blood sugar spikes in larger portions                          |
| <b>Root vegetables</b> (potato, kumara, parsnip)          | Nutritious but high-glycaemic when overcooked or eaten in large quantities, monitor your response                                          |
| <b>Nightshades</b> (tomatoes, capsicum, eggplant, chilli) | Contain solanine which aggravates inflammation in people with arthritis or autoimmune conditions, fine for many, a trigger for some        |
| <b>Legumes</b> (chickpeas, lentils, beans — canned)       | Rich in fibre but contain lectins and phytates that irritate some guts; soaking and cooking from dried reduces this significantly          |
| <b>Corn</b>                                               | Often tolerated but frequently GMO and a hidden allergen that drives gut inflammation in sensitive people                                  |
| <b>Dark chocolate</b> (70%+ cacao)                        | Rich in anti-inflammatory flavonoids but sugar content and caffeine can tip it either way — quality and quantity matter                    |
| <b>Red meat</b> (grass-fed, occasional)                   | Grass-fed beef contains beneficial omega-3s and CLA; grain-fed and frequent consumption tips toward inflammation                           |
| <b>Coffee</b> (1 cup, good quality)                       | Contains polyphenols that support gut diversity in small amounts, but excess cortisol and sleep disruption outweigh benefits               |
| <b>Natural sweeteners</b> (honey, maple syrup)            | Better than refined sugar but still spike blood glucose, use sparingly                                                                     |

# The Pain Plate Pyramid

## What's on your plate is in your body's pain signal.

### Bottom Tier — No Pain Foods

#### "The Freedom Zone"

These foods actively work with your body to reduce inflammation and rebuild.

These foods feed beneficial gut bacteria, repair the gut lining, reduce inflammatory cytokines, and provide the micronutrients your body needs for tissue repair, nerve health, and pain modulation.

| Food                                                                  | Why it heals                                                                                                                                  |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Fermented foods (sauerkraut, kimchi, kefir, kombucha, miso)</b>    | Flood the gut with beneficial live bacteria; dramatically reduce inflammatory markers within weeks; directly linked to lower pain sensitivity |
| <b>Sprouts (broccoli, mung bean, lentil, sunflower)</b>               | Extraordinarily concentrated in sulforaphane and enzymes, anti-inflammatory, detoxifying and gut-healing                                      |
| <b>Leafy greens (spinach, kale, silverbeet, rocket, bok choy)</b>     | Rich in magnesium (a natural muscle relaxant), folate and antioxidants that neutralise inflammatory free radicals                             |
| <b>Oily fish (salmon, sardines, mackerel, anchovies)</b>              | Highest natural source of EPA and DHA omega-3s, directly suppress the inflammatory pathways that drive chronic pain                           |
| <b>Berries (blueberries, raspberries, blackberries, strawberries)</b> | Anthocyanins are among the most powerful anti-inflammatory compounds found in food; also repair gut lining                                    |
| <b>Extra virgin olive oil</b>                                         | Oleocanthal acts similarly to ibuprofen in the body, a natural COX inhibitor without the gut damage                                           |
| <b>Turmeric + black pepper</b>                                        | Curcumin is one of the most studied natural anti-inflammatories; black pepper increases absorption by 2000%                                   |
| <b>Ginger</b>                                                         | Blocks the same inflammatory enzymes as NSAIDs; reduces joint pain and gut inflammation                                                       |
| <b>Garlic &amp; onions</b>                                            | Prebiotic powerhouses that feed beneficial bacteria; allicin in garlic has direct anti-inflammatory action                                    |
| <b>Walnuts &amp; flaxseeds</b>                                        | Best plant-based sources of ALA omega-3; also rich in polyphenols that support gut microbiome diversity                                       |
| <b>Broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage (cruciferous family)</b>            | Contain sulforaphane and indole-3-carbinol, reduce inflammatory markers and support liver detox pathways                                      |
| <b>Avocado</b>                                                        | Rich in oleic acid and vitamin E, both reduce inflammatory markers; also supports gut lining integrity                                        |
| <b>Bone broth (slow-cooked)</b>                                       | Collagen, glycine and glutamine directly repair gut lining; reduces intestinal permeability ("leaky gut")                                     |
| <b>Green tea</b>                                                      | EGCG is one of the most potent anti-inflammatory polyphenols; also supports gut microbiome diversity                                          |
| <b>Sweet potato / kumara</b>                                          | Complex carbohydrate with beta-carotene and vitamin C, anti-inflammatory and gut-supportive                                                   |
| <b>Seeds (pumpkin, chia, hemp, sesame)</b>                            | Diverse mineral and omega-3 profiles; each adds to your weekly plant diversity count                                                          |
| <b>Herbs (parsley, coriander, basil, oregano, rosemary)</b>           | Each counts toward your 30 plants; rich in polyphenols and volatile oils with direct anti-inflammatory action                                 |
| <b>Lemon &amp; apple cider vinegar</b>                                | Stimulate digestive enzymes, support liver function and help shift the gut toward a more alkaline environment                                 |