



How Inflammation Influences Your Body from the Inside Out

LOOKING AHEAD...

February is Heart Month

Discover how you can reduce inflammation and support heart health.

MoveSpring February Challenge: Unplug & Recharge

You are challenged to set aside at least one hour for 26 days to disconnect from digital devices.

Wellness Webinars

Connect with a Registered Dietitian to learn practical ways to reduce inflammation and support your well-being through an anti-inflammatory diet, explore evidence-based strategies for managing the winter blues, and gain helpful tips for budgeting and setting meaningful financial goals.

The Recipe Corner

Smokey sheet pan roasted veggies – perfect for a quick side dish.

When we think about whole-body health, we often focus on nutrition, movement, sleep, and stress. Yet an essential part of wellness is frequently overlooked: oral health. Your mouth is a gateway to the rest of your body. Growing research shows that the condition of your teeth and gums can influence inflammation, immunity, chronic disease risk, and long-term well-being.

The mouth hosts a diverse community of bacteria (the good kind), tissue, and saliva that work together to protect you. A healthy oral environment supports digestion, prevents infection, and helps regulate inflammation. But when harmful bacteria build up (often due to insufficient brushing, flossing, or irregular dental visits), they can trigger gum disease. If left untreated, this chronic inflammation doesn't just stay in the gums; it can spread through the bloodstream and affect other systems in the body.

How Oral Inflammation Impacts the Body: Chronic inflammation is a driving factor behind many common health issues, including heart disease, diabetes, and other long-term conditions. Gum disease allows bacteria and inflammatory markers to enter circulation, increasing the body's overall inflammatory burden. [Studies](#) have found associations between poor oral health and several systemic conditions, including:

- **Heart disease:** Oral bacteria and inflammation may contribute to arterial plaque buildup.
- **Diabetes:** Gum disease can make blood sugar harder to manage, while high blood sugar can worsen gum disease - a two-way relationship.
- **Respiratory illness:** Harmful oral bacteria may be inhaled into the lungs.

While oral health is not the sole cause of these conditions, it is increasingly recognized as a modifiable risk factor that plays a meaningful role in overall wellness.

The Mouth–Gut Link: We often hear about the gut microbiome, but the mouth is its starting point. Whatever bacteria thrive in the mouth can travel to the digestive tract. Maintaining good oral hygiene helps support a healthier gut environment and may reduce inflammation throughout the body.

Protecting oral health doesn't require dramatic changes. Consistent habits have powerful long-term benefits:

- Brush twice daily with fluoride toothpaste. That's just 4 minutes of your day!
- Floss every day
- Visit your dentist twice a year. The [RCAB Dental Plan](#) covers two oral exams (including teeth cleanings) per calendar year. *Reminder: Employees/spouses enrolled in the RCAB Health Plan can earn \$100 into their HealthEquity HRA/HSA for an annual dental exam and cleaning completed in the current Plan Year!*
- Choose nutrient-rich foods, limit added sugars, and drink plenty of water

By prioritizing oral care, you can help reduce inflammation, strengthen your immune system, and protect your long-term well-being.



Calming Inflammation for a Healthier Heart

February is **National Heart Health Month** and a great time to reflect on all our heart does for us and show it some love. Your heart is an amazing muscle, beating 24/7, and moving oxygen and nutrients to every corner of your body. Given how much it does, it's not surprising that heart disease remains the leading cause of death in the United States. The good news is there are many lifestyle factors that help support heart health and decrease chronic inflammation.



Here are some of the most impactful:

1. **Follow a Mediterranean Diet:** A Mediterranean-style eating pattern is one of the most well-studied approaches for heart health and inflammation. It emphasizes vegetables, fruit, beans/lentils, whole grains, nuts, seeds, extra-virgin olive oil, and seafood, while limiting ultra-processed foods and excess added sugar. Small shifts in this direction can make a difference.
2. **Add fermented foods:** Fermented foods can help improve gut microbe balance, strengthen the gut barrier, and produce compounds that support a healthier inflammatory response. One study found that participants eating more fermented foods showed a decrease in 19 different inflammatory markers! Readily available options include yogurt or kefir, sauerkraut, kimchi, miso, and kombucha.
3. **Polyphenols for the win!** Polyphenols are plant compounds found in many plants, including berries, apples, broccoli, green tea, dark chocolate, extra-virgin olive oil, and nuts. They help to suppress inflammation by neutralizing free radicals, supporting the lining of blood vessels, and influencing gut microbes beneficially. The simplest way to think about polyphenols: the more plants (and the more colorful), the better!
4. **Get plenty of omega-3 fatty acids.** Omega-3s, found in fatty fish (think "SMASH": Salmon, Mackerel, Anchovies, Sardines, Herring) as well as walnuts, chia seeds, and flaxseeds help reduce inflammation, lower triglycerides, and improve arterial function. If you don't like fish, aim for plant-based sources regularly, and discuss with your clinician whether a supplement is necessary.
5. **Don't neglect oral health.** Gum disease, such as gingivitis and periodontal disease, are big drivers of inflammation. Brushing, flossing, and dental cleanings can make a real difference in inflammatory load over time.
6. **Spend time outside.** We all know intuitively that spending time outside and in nature is good for us. But there's also some interesting research behind it. In one recent study called the Green Heart Project, researchers planted thousands of trees and shrubs in an urban neighborhood and followed residents over time. They took blood samples before and after the neighborhood was "greened." What did they find? After four years, residents in the tree area decreased levels of inflammation by up to 20% without any other interventions!
7. **Spices can help too.** From oregano to black pepper, many spices help decrease inflammation. Some spices are particularly effective, such as turmeric, ginger, cinnamon, cardamom, cloves, and black pepper.



MASSACHUSETTS



Make the Most of Your RCAB Health Plan

Get a head start on 2026 by exploring what your RCAB Health Plan with Blue Cross Blue Shield of MA has to offer. If you haven't already done so, register for [MyBlue](#), your personalized online member account, to make the most of your health plan benefits.

View the [BCBS of MA Welcome Video](#).



Wellness Webinars



Go With Your Gut: Building an Anti-Inflammatory Lifestyle from the Inside Out

[Tuesday, February 10: 6:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.](#)

Chronic inflammation is a prevalent factor in most Western diseases, including premature aging and heart disease. In this webinar, you will learn what inflammation is, why it plays a significant role in your overall health, and how it relates to gut health. You'll also explore anti-inflammatory foods and eating patterns that can help support your optimal well-being. Empower yourself with practical tips to create an anti-inflammatory lifestyle that works for you!



Can't make the live webinar? Register below to receive the recording.

Good News about the Winter Blues

Use access code **RCAB** to view the webinar.

[Friday, February 20: 12-12:15 p.m.](#)

For many, the winter months can feel awfully long with colder temperatures and far less sunshine. Motivation and mood can drop, either subtly or so significantly, that even usual day-to-day activities feel impossible. In this 15-minute webinar, you will learn the good news: there are research-supported steps you can take to live fully, even through wintertime challenges.



Building a budget

[Tuesday, February 10: 10 a.m. and 2 p.m.](#)

[Thursday, February 19: 12 p.m. and 3 p.m.](#)

Review the essential budgeting steps, including setting financial goals and using the 50/30/20 rule. You'll also explore tips on tracking expenses and building an emergency fund.

Setting Up Other Financial Goals

[Thursday, February 19: 10 a.m. and 2 p.m.](#)

Learn how to save to cover both short and long-term financial goals.

Webinar Recordings

View the recorded webinars from last month!



PLAY NOW!

Use access code **RCAB** to access recordings.

[Diabetes and Your Diet](#)

[This Time I'm Really Going to Do It:
Making Our Resolutions Stick](#)

MoveSpring February Challenge



Unplug & Recharge

It's important to take breaks from technology to give our brains and bodies a chance to rest and reset. This month, reduce your screen time and engage in offline activities. You are challenged to set aside at least one hour for 26 days to disconnect from digital devices. Focus on reading books, exercising, spending time in nature, or connecting with loved ones. No peeking at texts or scrolling through social media for that one dedicated hour!

Employees and spouses enrolled in the RCAB Health Plans may click [here](#) or scan the QR code to join by February 7.



THE RECIPE CORNER

Easy Smoky Sheet Pan Oven Roasted Veggies

Recipe from [Make It Dairy Free](#)

Ingredients

- 1 ½ teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon smoked paprika
- ¾ teaspoon cinnamon
- ½ tsp dried basil
- ½ teaspoon dried thyme
- ½ teaspoon cumin
- ½ teaspoon fennel seeds
- ¼ teaspoon ground cloves
- salt and pepper, to taste
- 15 oz can chickpeas, rinsed and drained
- 1 large sweet potato, peeled and cubed small
- 2-3 tablespoon olive oil, divided
- 1 baby bok choy, thoroughly cleaned and separated
- 1 small red onion, sliced into wedges and separated
- 3 cloves garlic, minced



Directions:

1. Preheat the oven to 425 degrees F. Whisk all the spices/seasonings together in a small bowl and set aside.
2. Into a large bowl, add the chickpeas and cubed sweet potatoes. Drizzle half of the olive oil and toss to coat well. Then, add half the seasoning mixture and stir to combine. Add to a sheet pan and roast in the oven for 18-20 minutes.
3. In the same large bowl, add the bok choy and red onion, drizzle with the remaining olive oil and toss to coat well. Then, add the remaining half of the seasonings and stir to combine.
4. Remove the sheet pan from the oven. Add the bok choy and onions, then sprinkle minced garlic evenly over the top. Place the sheet pan back into oven for 7-10 minutes. Potatoes should be fork tender and the bok choy should be slightly wilted.
5. Serve with a grain of choice, lean protein of choice, and optional garnishes – sesame seeds, cilantro, or green onions.

*Wishing you continued health,
The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston Benefits Department*