

TAME THE FLAME: A GUIDE TO STOPPING FLARE UPS (AND AVOIDING FUTURE ONES!)



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THE RA & AUTOIMMUNITY SYMPOSIUM



MY PERSONAL JOURNEY

I have experienced many years of pain from my autoimmune disease and arthritis. I understand how it feels to be a patient and understand that not every patient wants pharmaceutical drugs to get better.

Hi, it's Dr. Micah Yu here! I'm sharing my journey – my own battle with arthritis – and some of my top tips for how you can overcome inflammation. This is the story of how I navigated misdiagnosis, conventional treatment, and ultimately found healing through integrative medicine and a complete lifestyle transformation.

I've created this guide and the checklists at the end as a companion to my Autoimmunity & Rheumatoid Arthritis Symposium. You've already registered, but be sure to check out our options for owning the symposium and even how to work with me down the line!

THE FIRST SIGNS

It started in high school. I was severely overweight and wanted to make a change. I joined my high school football team and adopted a high-protein version of the Atkins diet—think steak, protein powders, dairy—easily consuming 150–200 grams of protein a day.

While I lost weight and got stronger, it came at a cost.

One night, I woke up with excruciating pain in my big toe. It was so intense it felt like someone had slammed it with a hammer. My dad, a family physician, suspected gout. Lab results confirmed it—my uric acid was sky-high.

I was 17 years old and diagnosed with a form of arthritis I thought was for the elderly. And it only got worse as I got older. Imagine being in your early 20s, limping through campus, feeling like you're decades older than you are.



After college, I moved to San Francisco to complete post-baccalaureate coursework for medical school. My symptoms began changing—pain appeared in my hands and knees, I suffered recurrent fevers, and was confined to bed for weeks.

Despite taking medications, the flares continued. I began to suspect something more than gout was going on.

I saw two different rheumatologists—one in the community, one at an academic institution. Both suspected something beyond gout, but no one had clear answers. My inflammatory markers were elevated, but my antibodies were negative.

No one mentioned diet, lifestyle, or integrative options.



THE TURNING POINT: LIFESTYLE MEDICINE

My wife, Dr. Melissa Mondala, introduced me to lifestyle medicine during residency. She had received formal training in it, and through her, I was introduced to a whole food, plant-based diet.

At first, I was skeptical. I loved my meat and processed foods! But still, I committed to trying a plant-based diet seriously. I cut out processed foods, minimized oil, sugar, and salt, and focused on vegetables, fruits, legumes, whole grains, and tofu.



Three months in, I noticed something remarkable—I hadn't flared. No stiffness, no pain. Lab tests showed my C-reactive protein levels had gone negative. A year passed with no major symptoms.

It felt like a miracle.

Because of my healing, I wanted to help others in the same way. I became board-certified in Lifestyle Medicine, completed the Integrative Medicine fellowship at the University of Arizona under Dr. Andrew Weil, and earned my certification in Functional Medicine.

Now I get to help people all over!

THE TURNING POINT: LIFESTYLE MEDICINE

These three approaches—conventional rheumatology, integrative medicine, and functional medicine—are now the pillars of how I care for patients. I've learned that healing isn't one-size-fits-all.

Not everyone responds the way I did, but having more tools means I can help more people.



**LET ME SHARE A BIT MORE ABOUT
DIET, AND ALSO TELL YOU ABOUT
ONE OF THE BEST TOOLS THAT
YOU CAN START DOING THIS VERY
SECOND!**



FOOD IS FUEL: TOP FOODS TO LOWER INFLAMMATION

As I said before, I've used food as medicine to help manage my own symptoms...and I want you to do the same.

There's no one-size-fits-all approach to diet, especially when it comes to autoimmune conditions. But there is solid science behind certain foods that help reduce inflammation and support immune health.

But it's so important to address diet, because these are just some of the symptoms that come with an autoimmune flare...

- Fatigue
- Brain Fog
- Joint Pain
- Rashes/Itching
- Bloating
- Nausea
- Weight Gain

So, let's dive into the top five anti-inflammatory food groups I recommend and why they matter. Plus, I'll give you a couple of bonus tips to round out your healing plate!



FOOD GROUP 1: VEGETABLES

Let's start with the obvious one: vegetables. They're foundational to almost every anti-inflammatory eating plan—whether it's Whole Food Plant-Based, Paleo, or Mediterranean.

Why? Because vegetables are rich in **fiber** and **phytonutrients**. Those are natural plant compounds that fight inflammation in powerful ways

From broccoli to carrots, kale to celery, each vegetable offers its own immune-boosting inflammation fighting properties.

One study showed that increasing vegetable intake helped lower markers like C-reactive protein (CRP) and TNF-alpha, two important indicators of systemic inflammation.

If you've reacted negatively to certain vegetables in the past (for example, spinach), that doesn't mean all veggies are off-limits! Start slow and find what works for your body.



FOOD GROUP 4: BEANS AND LEGUMES

Another hot topic! Beans and legumes like lentils, black beans, and chickpeas are packed with plant-based protein and fiber. Yes, some individuals may experience flares due to lectins or other compounds, but for many others—including myself—these foods have been powerful tools for healing.

Listen to your body. Keep a journal to document your journey. And if beans don't agree with you, avoid them. But don't discount their anti-inflammatory potential without trying.



FOOD GROUP 5: OMEGA-3 FATTY ACID

Omega-3s are well-studied for their ability to reduce systemic inflammation. They're found in fatty fish like salmon and sardines, but also in algae-based oils for those who are vegan or vegetarian. They are also found in chia seeds and flax seeds. Fish don't produce omega-3s themselves—they get them from eating algae. So going straight to the source is always an option. If you do eat meat, opt for lean meats and avoid processed meats like bacon or deli slices. Grass-fed or grass-finished meats are a better choice than conventionally raised red meat.



BUT ABOVE ALL...



HONOR YOUR INDIVIDUALITY

Every patient is different. Your **gut microbiome**, genetics, and environment shape how your body responds to food. Some people thrive on a Whole Food Plant-Based diet. Others do better on Paleo or Mediterranean approaches.

The key is finding what works for you.

Personally, I've had incredible success with a plant-based approach—but I've seen patients improve with other strategies too. That's why I always encourage experimentation within a framework of real, unprocessed, nutrient-dense foods.

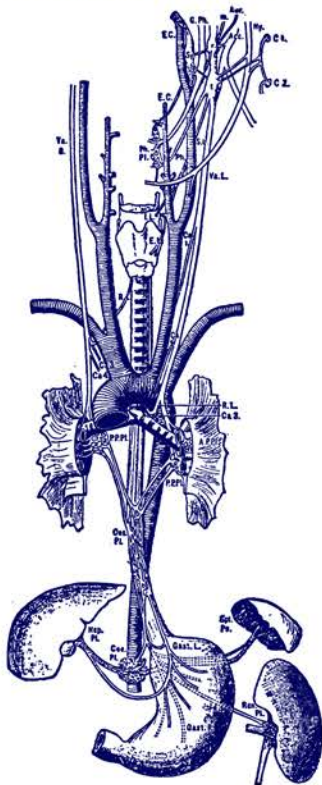
Remember: food is one of the most powerful tools you have to reduce inflammation and take control of your health. It's not about perfection. It's about progress—and every bite matters.

VAGUS NERVE STIMULATION: THE FUTURE OF CHRONIC PAIN RELIEF?

But it's not just diet that's important. When we think about chronic inflammation or autoimmune conditions like rheumatoid arthritis, most people jump straight to the immune system. But there's another powerful player in this equation that often gets overlooked: **The Nervous System.**

The vagus nerve is the main nerve of the **parasympathetic nervous system**—often referred to as the “rest and digest” system. While most chronic illness keeps us stuck in **sympathetic overdrive**—that constant “fight or flight” state—activating the vagus nerve helps bring the body back to balance.

Research in **psychoneuroimmunology** (yes, that's a mouthful!) shows that our **mind, nervous system, and immune system are all interconnected.** By stimulating the vagus nerve, we can help regulate immune response, reduce inflammation, and even improve emotional health.



VAGUS NERVE
STIMULATION (VNS) IS
A THERAPEUTIC
TECHNIQUE THAT
INVOLVES THE USE OF
ELECTRICAL IMPULSES
TO STIMULATE THE
VAGUS NERVE, A KEY
COMPONENT OF THE
PARASYMPATHETIC
NERVOUS SYSTEM.

9 NATURAL WAYS TO STIMULATE THE VAGUS NERVE



Splashing Cold Water to Face



Singing and chanting



Massage Therapy



Yoga



Meditation



Gargling



Laughter



Exercise



Deep and slow breathing

9 WAYS TO STIMULATE THE VAGUS NERVE EXPLAINED

Deep Breathing: Use diaphragmatic or “belly” breathing to activate the parasympathetic system. Try box breathing: inhale for 4 seconds, hold for 4, exhale for 4—and repeat.

Meditation and Prayer: These practices help calm the mind and stimulate the vagus nerve, lowering inflammation and stress.

Exercise: Movement—whether it’s walking, resistance training, or swimming—supports vagal tone. You don’t need intensity; rhythm and consistency are what matter.

Yoga: Combines stretching, breathing, and mindfulness—all of which enhance vagus nerve activity.

Cold Water Therapy: Splashing cold water on your face or doing cold plunges can kickstart the parasympathetic response.

Singing, Humming, or Chanting: These vocal vibrations stimulate the vagus nerve via the vocal cords. (No, you don’t have to be a good singer!)

Massage and Reflexology: Physical touch, especially around the neck and feet, has been shown to enhance vagal activity and promote relaxation.

Laughter: Yes, laughing actually stimulates the vagus nerve and promotes feel-good neurotransmitters. Find a reason to laugh every day.

Gargling with Water: The muscle engagement in your throat stimulates vagal activity—a simple, effective technique.



BEYOND INFLAMMATION: THE BROADER BENEFITS OF VNS

Stimulating the vagus nerve doesn't just help with autoimmune conditions. It's also been shown to

- Banish anxiety
- Help manage depression
- Even reduce seizures.

In fact, vagus nerve stimulation is FDA-approved for certain neurological conditions. There are even devices on the market—including ear clips and wrist wearables—that can stimulate the vagus nerve electronically.

While these tools can be effective, **I always recommend starting with natural methods first.** These practices are safe, accessible, and often just as powerful.

Try one or more of these nine practices and see how your body—and mind—respond. Because when we support the nervous system, we're supporting every other system in the body too.

As I wrap up I want to include three checklists for you of some triggers you may encounter and how to minimize them

FOOD TRIGGERS CHECKLIST: WHAT TO WATCH FOR WITH AUTOIMMUNITY

Avoid or minimize these inflammatory foods:

- Ultra-processed foods (chips, snack bars, soda, boxed meals)
- Fried foods (french fries, fried chicken, tempura, fast food)
- Refined sugars (candy, soda, pastries, high-fructose corn syrup)
- Conventional dairy (milk, cheese, cream—especially if symptoms worsen)
- Excess salt (especially in packaged and restaurant foods)
- Processed meats (bacon, sausages, deli meats, hot dogs)
- Gluten (consider an elimination trial if you suspect sensitivity)

Here's some extra tips:

- Read labels closely for hidden sugars and preservatives
- Replace dairy with plant-based alternatives
- Stick to home-cooked meals as much as possible

ENVIRONMENTAL TRIGGERS MINIMIZE EXPOSURE TO REDUCE FLARE

Avoid or minimize these exposures:

- Fragranced cleaning products can contain volatile organic compounds and phthalates which can trigger flareups
- Some air fresheners and candles contain chemicals. Opt for beeswax scented with essential oils only
- Mold in bathrooms, basements, and air vents
- Nonstick cookware such as Teflon can contain PFAS
- Plastic food containers can leech into your food
- Wifi Routers can increase your EMF toxicity

Here's some extra tips:

- Switch to natural, unscented, or DIY cleaners such as vinegar and baking soda
- Make sure you are regularly using your dehumidifier to avoid mold buildup
- Turn your WIFI off at night or when you are not in the home to minimize EMFs

STRESS RELIEF CHECKLIST: HOW TO ACTUALLY RELAX

Add these lifestyle changes to help your mind and body rest from constant low level stressors

- Practice daily deep breathing or box breathing
- Incorporate regular movement (walking, yoga, swimming)
- Prioritize sleep hygiene and rest
- Limit overstimulation from digital devices
- Avoid excessive alcohol and caffeine
- Engage in supportive relationships or community
- Incorporate gratitude, meditation, or prayer
- Recognize food guilt or perfectionism as stressors—practice grace and flexibility

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