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The Role of an Anti-Inflammatory Diet in Post-Workout Recovery: Mechanisms, Evidence, and Practical Implications

AUTHORS

1. **Angelika Złotnik**
   Medical University of Silesia, Poniatowskiego 15, 40-055 Katowice, Poland
   ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0004-5142-6199
2. **Małgorzata Filak**
   Independent Public Health Care Facility, Municipal Hospitals Complex in Chorzów, 11 Strzelców Bytomskich Street, 41-500 Chorzów
   ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0009-9099-5083
3. **Agata Zabierowska**
   Medical University of Silesia, Poniatowskiego 15, 40-055 Katowice, Poland
   ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0002-1149-0108
4. **Agnieszka Suszek**
   Medical University of Silesia, Poniatowskiego 15, 40-055 Katowice, Poland
   ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0002-4640-8143
5. **Agnieszka Walus**
   Medical University of Silesia, Poniatowskiego 15, 40-055 Katowice, Poland
   ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0000-5903-633X
6. **Maciej Bulwa**
   Medical University of Silesia, Poniatowskiego 15, 40-055 Katowice, Poland
   ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0007-2661-0797
7. **Adrianna Lysko**
   Healthcare Centre Beskidzka, Beskidzka 3, 41-500 Chorzów, Poland
   ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0001-5854-7135
8. **Julia Surowaniec**
   Medical University of Silesia, Poniatowskiego 15, 40-055 Katowice, Poland
   ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0008-5469-7727
9. **Monika Suszek**
   Medical University of Silesia, Poniatowskiego 15, 40-055 Katowice, Poland
   ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0000-4794-4410

10. Natalia Wieczorek – Durdzińska

Regional Blood Donation and Transfusion Center in Raciborz, Henryka Sienkiewicza 3A, 47-400 Racibórz

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0005-6115-1640

Corresponding author:

Małgorzata Filak

ABSTRACT

Introduction:

Recovery after intense exercise is crucial to maintaining performance, health and minimizing the risk of injury in athletes. In recent years, increasing attention has been paid to the role of anti-inflammatory diet in modulating the post-exercise inflammatory response and accelerating repair processes.

Aim of the study:

The purpose of the study was to analyze current scientific research on the effects of an anti-inflammatory diet on post-workout recovery, identify the most important ingredients with anti-inflammatory effects, and provide practical dietary recommendations for physically active individuals.

Materials and Methods:

A review of scientific literature from 2015-2025 was conducted from ReaserchGate, PubMed and Google Scholar databases. Articles were searched in English using the following keywords: anti-inflammatory diet, exercise recovery, muscle regeneration, omega-3, curcumin, polyphenols, exercise-induced muscle damage, sports nutrition, inflammation markers.

Results:

The analyzed studies showed that a diet rich in anti-inflammatory components, such as omega-3 fatty acids, polyphenols (e.g. curcumin, quercetin), vitamins C, D, E and probiotics, contributes to the reduction of inflammatory markers (CRP, IL-6, TNF-α), reduction of delayed muscle soreness (DOMS) and acceleration of recovery of muscle strength and function.

Conclusions:

An anti-inflammatory diet is an effective tool to promote post-workout recovery by modulating the inflammatory response and accelerating repair processes. Incorporating foods rich in omega-3 fatty acids, polyphenols, antioxidant vitamins, and probiotics into the daily diet can significantly improve recovery, reduce muscle damage, and support the body's adaptation to exercise.

Keywords: *anti-inflammatory diet, exercise recovery, muscle regeneration, omega-3, curcumin, polyphenols, exercise-induced muscle damage, sports nutrition, inflammation markers.*

I. Introduction

Intense physical activity, as an integral part of modern sport and recovery, induces complex physiological changes in the human body. One of the most important aspects of these changes is the occurrence of Exercise-Induced Muscle Damage (EIMD), which is characterized by microdamage to muscle fibers, an increase in the level of inflammatory markers and a temporary decrease in physical performance [1, 2].

Inflammation resulting from intense training is a biphasic phenomenon. In the first phase, immediately after exercise, there is a release of such pro-inflammatory cytokines as TNF-α, IL-6 and IL-8, which initiates repair processes in damaged tissues [3, 4]. However, prolonged inflammation can negatively affect regenerative processes, leading to delayed onset muscle soreness (DOMS) and deterioration of performance parameters [5, 2].

Contemporary research is increasingly focusing on the role of nutrition in modulating the body's inflammatory response to exercise. An anti-inflammatory diet, characterized by a high content of bioactive compounds with antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties, may be an effective strategy for optimizing regenerative processes [6, 7]. Of particular interest to researchers are components such as omega-3 fatty acids, polyphenols, curcumin or antioxidants, which have documented anti-inflammatory effects [8, 3].

Post-training recovery is a multistep process involving protein synthesis, rebuilding muscle fibers, replenishing energy stores, and removing metabolic products [1, 5]. Each of these stages can be supported by appropriate nutrients, making the anti-inflammatory diet a tool with therapeutic potential in sports medicine.

II. Aim of the Study

The purpose of this literature review is to comprehensively analyze the current state of knowledge on the importance of the anti-inflammatory diet in post-workout recovery processes, identify the most effective nutrients, and provide practical recommendations for athletes and physically active individuals.

III. Material and methods

This literature review was conducted in accordance with PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines for narrative reviews. The search strategy included a systematic search of scientific databases to identify publications on the effects of an anti-inflammatory diet on post-exercise recovery.

IIIa. Search strategy

The literature search was conducted in PubMed, Google Scholar and ReaserchGate databases between January 2017 and April 2025. The following English keywords were used: anti-inflammatory diet, exercise recovery, muscle regeneration, omega-3, curcumin, polyphenols, exercise-induced muscle damage, sports nutrition, inflammation markers.

IIIb. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Publications meeting the following criteria were included in the analysis: systematic reviews, meta-analyses, randomized clinical trials and observational studies published in peer-reviewed scientific journals; studies conducted on a population of adult athletes or physically active individuals; publications in English or Polish; studies evaluating the effects of anti-inflammatory dietary components on markers of recovery, inflammation or physical performance.

Publications that do not meet the above criteria, animal studies (except for mechanistic studies relevant to understanding the processes), clinical cases, and publications without scientific peer review were excluded.

IIIc. Data analysis

The following data were recorded for each included publication: authors, year of publication, type of study, sample size, characteristics of the nutritional intervention, duration of supplementation, markers studied, and main results. Particular attention was paid to the effectiveness of individual anti-inflammatory ingredients in reducing inflammatory markers, improving recovery parameters, and affecting physical performance.

IV. Mechanisms of action of anti-inflammatory diet in post-workout recovery

IVa. Exercise-induced inflammatory processes

Intense exercise triggers a cascade of biochemical changes leading to inflammation in muscle tissue. This process begins with mechanical microdamage to muscle fibers during eccentric contractions, leading to violation of cell membrane integrity and release of intracellular enzymes into the myocellular space [1, 4].

Muscle microdamage activates the immune system, leading to the infiltration of neutrophils and macrophages into the site of injury. These cells produce reactive oxygen species (ROS) and pro-inflammatory cytokines, including tumor necrosis factor alpha (TNF-α), interleukins IL-1β, IL-6 and IL-8 [3, 2]. At the same time, levels of muscle damage markers such as creatine kinase (CK) and lactate dehydrogenase (LDH) increase [9, 10].

Inflammation, while initially necessary for the initiation of repair processes, can negatively affect regeneration if prolonged. Chronic inflammation leads to increased production of free radicals, which can cause further cellular damage and delay healing processes [7, 12].

IVb. Anti-inflammatory mechanisms of dietary components

Anti-inflammatory dietary components act at different levels of the inflammatory cascade, modulating both the initiation and resolution processes of inflammation. The main mechanisms of action include inhibition of transcription factors responsible for the production of inflammatory mediators, neutralization of free radicals and activation of endogenous antioxidant systems [6, 7]. Omega-3 fatty acids, particularly eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA), act by modulating the production of eicosanoids - lipid mediators responsible for regulating inflammatory processes. EPA competes with arachidonic acid for a binding site with the enzyme cyclooxygenase, leading to the production of less pro-inflammatory prostaglandin series 3 instead of pro-inflammatory prostaglandin series 2 [8, 12].

Polyphenols, a broad group of plant compounds present in fruits, vegetables and tea, exhibit potent antioxidant properties by neutralizing free radicals and inducing the expression of endogenous antioxidant enzymes. In addition, polyphenols modulate the activity of the transcription factor NF-κB, a key regulator of pro-inflammatory genes [8, 14].

V. Omega-3 fatty acids in post-workout recovery

Va. Sources and biochemical characteristics

Omega-3 fatty acids are a group of polyunsaturated fatty acids characterized by the presence of the first double bond at the third carbon atom from the blanket of the methylated chain. The most important for human health are alpha-linolenic acid (ALA), eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) [6, 8].

The main dietary sources of EPA and DHA are fatty marine fish, such as salmon, mackerel, sardines, and tuna. Plant sources, including walnuts, flaxseed, and flaxseed oil, primarily provide ALA, which can be converted to EPA and DHA to a limited extent in the human body [6, 16].

Vb. Mechanisms of anti-inflammatory effects

Studies indicate that supplementation with omega-3 fatty acids can significantly modulate the inflammatory response to exercise through several complementary mechanisms. EPA and DHA affect the composition of cell membranes, increasing their fluidity and modulating the activity of receptors and membrane enzymes [8, 14].

The key mechanism of action is the competition with arachidonic acid for a binding site with cyclooxygenase and lipoxygenase enzymes. This leads to a reduction in the synthesis of pro-inflammatory arachidonic acid-derived eicosanoids, while increasing the production of less pro-inflammatory or anti-inflammatory EPA-derived mediators [12, 15].

Vc. Clinical evidence

A study conducted by a team of researchers found that eight weeks of supplementation with a high-protein diet enriched with omega-3 (2.2 g/day) combined with resistance training led to significant improvements in muscle strength and a reduction in inflammatory markers in older men [14]. Increases in muscle power, reductions in the IL-6/IL-10 ratio, and reductions in HMGB-1 levels were observed, indicating effective suppression of the inflammatory response.

Studies on endurance athletes also confirm the beneficial effects of omega-3. Supplementation leads to a reduction in markers of muscle damage, reduced recovery time and improved performance parameters [5, 8]. Of particular importance are reports of omega-3's effects on reducing delayed muscle soreness and speeding up recovery to full fitness.

VI. Polyphenols and their role in muscle recovery

VIa. Characterization and classification of polyphenols

Polyphenols are the largest group of bioactive compounds in the plant kingdom, characterized by the presence of multiple phenolic groups in their chemical structure. Due to their structural diversity, polyphenols are divided into several major classes: flavonoids, phenolic acids, stilbenes and lignans [8, 15].

Flavonoids, the most numerous group of polyphenols, include anthocyanins (responsible for the red and purple coloration of fruits), quercetin (present in onions and apples), catechins (in green tea) and resveratrol (in grapes and red wine). Each of these subgroups exhibits specific biological properties, although all are characterized by antioxidant activity [4, 9].

VIb. Mechanisms of antioxidant activity

Polyphenols act as antioxidants by directly neutralizing free radicals, chelating metal ions that catalyze oxidative reactions, and inducing endogenous antioxidant systems. The phenolic structure allows polyphenols to donate electrons to free radicals, transforming them into stable, non-reactive forms [8, 13].

In addition, polyphenols activate the Nrf2/ARE (Nuclear factor erythroid 2-related factor 2/Antioxidant Response Element) signaling pathway, leading to increased expression of antioxidant enzymes such as superoxide dismutase, catalase and glutathione peroxidase. This mechanism provides long-lasting antioxidant protection, which persists even after the metabolism of exogenous antioxidants [7, 12].

VIc. Tart cherry juice as a source of bioactive polyphenols

Of particular interest to researchers is the juice of tart cherry (Prunus cerasus), especially the Montmorency variety, as a rich source of anthocyanins and other polyphenols with documented anti-inflammatory effects. Studies show that regular supplementation with tart cherry juice can significantly affect post-workout recovery parameters [10, 14].

Howatson and colleagues conducted a study involving marathoners who consumed tart cherry juice for 5 days before the marathon, on the day of the marathon, and for 2 days after the marathon. The results showed faster recovery of knee extensor isometric strength a reduction in inflammatory markers and C-reactive protein. The total antioxidant status of the body was 10% higher in the supplement group compared to the placebo group [10].

Similar results were obtained in a study by Bowtell and colleagues, who examined the effects of supplementation with tart cherry juice concentrate (30 ml twice daily) for 7 days before, on the day of, and for 2 days after intense resistance training. The experimental group showed faster recovery of maximal strength and less oxidative stress compared to the control group [11].

VId. Other sources of polyphenols in an athlete's diet

In addition to tart cherry juice, important sources of polyphenols in an anti-inflammatory diet include beets, pomegranates, cocoa and various types of berries. Each of these sources provides a specific profile of polyphenols, allowing for the synergistic effects of various bioactive compounds [8, 16].

Beets contain betalains, which exhibit potent anti-inflammatory properties and can improve blood flow by increasing nitric oxide production. Pomegranates are rich in punicalagin and ellagic acid, which show strong anti-inflammatory effects and may protect against oxidative damage [8, 14].

VII. Curcumin as a powerful anti-inflammatory agent

VIIa. Biochemical characteristics of curcumin

Curcumin (1,7-bis(4-hydroxy-3-methoxyphenyl)-1,6-heptadiene-3,5-dione) is the main bioactive component of turmeric (Curcuma longa) rhizome, accounting for 3-8% of the dry weight of the spice. It is a polyphenolic compound characterized by an intense yellow color and strong antioxidant properties [2, 3].

The chemical structure of curcumin contains two phenolic groups connected by a seven-carbon chain with conjugated double bonds, which gives it the ability to neutralize free radicals and interact with many cellular proteins. This unique structure is responsible for turmeric's versatile biological activity [2, 4].

VIIb. Mechanisms of anti-inflammatory action

Curcumin exerts its anti-inflammatory effects by modulating multiple signaling pathways associated with the inflammatory response. The most important mechanism is inhibition of the transcription factor NF-κB (Nuclear Factor kappa B), which regulates the expression of more than 400 genes associated with inflammatory response, cell proliferation and apoptosis [3, 4].

By inhibiting NF-κB, curcumin reduces the production of pro-inflammatory cytokines, including TNF-α, IL-1β, IL-6 and IL-8. In addition, curcumin modulates the activity of inflammatory enzymes such as cyclooxygenase-2 (COX-2) and lipoxygenase, reducing the synthesis of pro-inflammatory eicosanoids [2, 4].

Curcumin also exhibits potent antioxidant properties, acting as a direct free radical scavenger and inducer of endogenous antioxidant enzymes. It activates the Nrf2 pathway, leading to increased expression of protective enzymes such as heme-oxygenase-1 and γ-glutamylcysteine synthetase [2, 3].

VIIIc. Clinical evidence of efficacy in post-workout recovery

Clinical studies support curcumin's efficacy in reducing exercise-induced muscle damage and accelerating recovery. A meta-analysis of randomized trials showed that curcumin supplementation at doses of 90-5000 mg/day can significantly reduce subjective muscle soreness, increase antioxidant capacity and reduce creatine kinase activity [4].

Tanabe and colleagues conducted a study in which administration of 180 mg of curcumin daily for 7 days before and 7 days after inducing muscle damage led to a significant reduction in pain intensity and TNF-α levels [2]. These results support the efficacy of curcumin in modulating the inflammatory response at the molecular level.

A study by McFarlin and colleagues using a higher dose (400 mg) showed that curcumin administered for 2 days before and 4 days after inducing muscle damage could reduce TNF-α, IL-8 and creatine kinase levels [2]. These results indicate a dose-dependent efficacy of curcumin in protecting against muscle damage.

VIIId. Bioavailability problems and technological solutions

The main limitation of curcumin's therapeutic use is its low bioavailability due to rapid metabolism in the liver and limited absorption in the gastrointestinal tract. Curcumin is rapidly conjugated with glucuronic acid and sulfates, leading to its rapid elimination from the body. [3, 4].

Contemporary research is focused on developing formulations that increase the bioavailability of curcumin. The most effective approaches include combinations with piperine (an alkaloid from black pepper), which inhibits the glucuronidation of curcumin, and the use of nanotechnology to encapsulate curcumin into liposomes or nanoemulsions [2, 3].

Curcumin-piperine complexes show up to 20 times higher bioavailability compared to pure curcumin, making them more practical for clinical applications. Alternatively, curcumin phytosomes (complexes with phosphatidylcholine) also show much better absorption and longer residence time in the body [2, 4].

IX. Resveratrol as a modulator of post-workout recovery

IXa. Characteristics and sources of resveratrol

Resveratrol (3,5,4'-trihydroxystilbene) is a natural polyphenolic compound belonging to the stilbene group, produced by plants as a response to environmental stress, fungal infections and UV radiation. It is most commonly found in two isomers: trans-resveratrol (the biologically active form) and cis-resveratrol [10, 17].

The main sources of resveratrol in the human diet include red grape skins, red wine, berries, peanuts and some medicinal plants, such as Japanese knotweed (Polygonum cuspidatum). The resveratrol content of individual products is highly variable and depends on growing conditions, variety and processing [17].

IXb. Mechanisms of action at the cellular level

Resveratrol exerts its biological effects through modulation of many cellular signaling pathways. One of the most important mechanisms is the activation of sirtuin (SIRT1), whose activation leads to deacetylation and activation of PGC-1α (Peroxisome proliferator-activated receptor gamma coactivator 1-alpha), a master regulator of mitochondrial biogenesis [9]. This, in turn, may improve muscle performance and resistance to fatigue by increasing the number and efficiency of mitochondria in muscle cells [17].

IXc. Clinical evidence in the context of post-exercise recovery

Campagnello and colleagues conducted a study involving 36 non-exercising men who received placebo, 500 mg or 1,000 mg of resveratrol daily for seven days [9]. The results showed that both groups receiving resveratrol achieved similar scores on the jump test after seven days of supplementation, while the placebo group showed significant deterioration in performance. Participants receiving resveratrol recovered peak and average power faster, showed lower levels of fatigue and less muscle soreness. These effects were more pronounced in the group receiving the higher dose of resveratrol. Also, laboratory studies showed that the group receiving resveratrol had lower levels of markers of muscle damage, including creatine kinase and lactate dehydrogenase. These results indicate that resveratrol is effective in controlling muscle damage and maintaining performance after intense eccentric exercise [9].

X. Protein and amino acids in muscle recovery

Xa. The role of protein in repair processes

Protein is a fundamental nutrient necessary for the recovery and growth of muscle tissue after intense exercise. During training, especially resistance training, muscle protein breakdown (MPB) occurs, requiring an adequate supply of amino acids to offset or surpass this process through muscle protein synthesis (MPS) [1, 18].

Protein quality is determined by the amino acid composition, with particular emphasis on the content of exogenous (essential) amino acids and branched-chain amino acids (BCAA: leucine, isoleucine, valine). Leucine has a special role as a major activator of the mTOR (mechanistic Target of Rapamycin) pathway, a key regulator of muscle protein synthesis [18, 19].

Xb. Branched-chain amino acids and their specific actions

Branched-chain amino acids account for about 35% of the essential amino acids in muscle proteins and 40% of the essential amino acids required by the human body. Leucine, the most anabolically active of the BCAAs, directly activates the mTORC1 complex by stimulating Rheb (Ras homolog enriched in brain) protein, which leads to phosphorylation of key effectors of protein synthesis, including S6K1 (S6 kinase 1) and 4E-BP1 (4E-binding protein 1), ultimately resulting in increased mRNA translation and synthesis of new muscle proteins. This mechanism is particularly important during the post-workout recovery period, when the demand for protein synthesis increases significantly.

Studies indicate that BCAA supplementation may be particularly beneficial for workouts of long duration or during caloric restriction, when the availability of amino acids from the diet may be insufficient. However, with a balanced diet providing an adequate supply of complete protein, additional BCAA supplementation may not provide additional benefit [18, 19, 20].

Xc. Protein sources with anti-inflammatory properties

Some protein sources, particularly those derived from fish, contain additional bioactive components with anti-inflammatory properties, making them particularly valuable in the context of post-workout recovery [6, 16].

Protein from oily fish, such as salmon, mackerel and sardines, provides not only complete protein, but also omega-3 fatty acids, which can synergistically promote anti-inflammatory processes. In addition, some bioactive peptides derived from fish proteins show direct anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties [8, 18].

Whey protein, obtained as a by-product of cheese production, is characterized by its high biological content and rapid absorption, making it ideal for consumption immediately after training. In addition, whey protein contains immunoglobulins and lactoferrin, which can support immune function and exhibit anti-inflammatory properties [5, 20].

Plant sources of protein, although often characterized by a lower biological value, may provide additional bioactive components with anti-inflammatory properties. Hemp seed protein contains optimal amino acid ratios and omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids, while pea protein is characterized by a high content of arginine, an amino acid with vasodilatory properties [16, 21].

XI. Micronutrients and vitamins in regenerative processes

XIa. Magnesium as a key electrolyte

In the context of physical activity, magnesium is essential for proper muscle function, nerve conduction and energy metabolism [18, 20]. During intense exercise, the loss of magnesium through sweat can be significant, especially under conditions of high temperature and humidity. Magnesium deficiency can lead to muscle cramps, increased susceptibility to fatigue and prolonged recovery after training [1, 20]. Magnesium supplementation in physically active individuals may contribute to reducing feelings of fatigue and improving performance parameters. Magnesium also supports ATP synthesis through creatine kinase activation and participates in the regulation of calcium homeostasis in muscle cells, which is crucial for proper muscle contraction and diastole [18, 20].

XIb. Antioxidant vitamins

Vitamins C and E are major water- and fat-soluble antioxidants, respectively, and play a key role in protecting against exercise-induced oxidative stress. Vitamin C (ascorbic acid) acts as a reductant in free radical reactions and is essential for the synthesis of collagen, the main structural protein of connective tissue [7, 12].

Vitamin E (tocopherols and tocotrienols) protects cell membranes from lipid peroxidation by neutralizing lipid free radicals. It is particularly important for protecting mitochondria, the main sites of free radical production during intense physical activity [7, 12].

Studies show that supplementation with antioxidant vitamins may be beneficial in athletes under intense oxidative stress, but excessive doses may interfere with adaptive training responses. Optimal doses should supplement, not replace, endogenous antioxidant systems [12, 19].

XIc. B vitamins in energy metabolism

B vitamins play a key role as coenzymes in energy metabolism pathways, being essential for the efficient production of ATP from carbohydrates, fats and proteins. Vitamin B6 (pyridoxine) is involved in amino acid metabolism and neurotransmitter synthesis, which can affect neurological function and pain perception [18, 20].

Supplementation with vitamin B complex can support energy metabolism and reduce feelings of fatigue, especially during periods of intense training [1, 20].

Studies indicate that vitamin B6 may be particularly important for athletes due to its role in glycogen metabolism and creatine synthesis. Additionally, it may influence the modulation of the inflammatory response and immune function, although the mechanisms of these effects require further study [18, 20].

XII. Hydration as key in post-workout recovery

XIIa. The importance of proper hydration

During exercise, the body loses significant amounts of fluids through sweat and exhaled air. Dehydration as low as 2% of body weight can negatively affect physical performance and prolong recovery time. Inadequate hydration impairs the transport of nutrients to cells and the removal of metabolic products [1,18].

Muscle regeneration requires efficient blood flow for the delivery of oxygen and nutrients to damaged tissues. Adequate hydration maintains body fluid volume and blood pressure at optimal levels, promoting repair processes and removal of inflammatory mediators [18, 19].

XIIb. Post-workout hydration strategies

The optimal post-workout hydration strategy should take into account both the amount of fluid lost and the electrolyte composition of sweat. A general rule of thumb is to consume 150% of the volume of lost fluids within 6 hours after training, which takes into account continued fluid losses through sweating and diuresis [18, 19].

Isotonic drinks can be particularly beneficial after intense exercise, as they provide not only water, but also electrolytes and carbohydrates necessary to replenish glycogen stores. An optimal recovery drink should contain 6-8% carbohydrates and 20-30 mEq/L sodium [5, 20].

Some studies indicate potential benefits of adding protein to recovery drinks, which can promote muscle protein synthesis and improve fluid retention. A carbohydrate-to-protein ratio of 3:1 or 4:1 appears optimal for maximizing recovery [18, 19].

XIV. Nutritional timing and practical strategies

XIVa. The anabolic window after training

The concept of the ,,anabolic window" refers to the period of increased sensitivity of muscles to nutrients immediately following the end of training. Traditionally, this window has been assumed to last about 30-60 minutes post-exercise, but recent research suggests that this period can be much longer, especially in people who train regularly [18, 19].

Immediately after training, muscles show an increased throughput for glucose and amino acids, facilitating the replenishment of glycogen stores and muscle protein synthesis. In addition, muscle blood flow remains elevated for several hours after exercise, which promotes nutrient delivery [18, 20].

A key aspect is not only the timing, but also the composition of the post-workout meal. An optimal combination of protein (20-40g) and carbohydrates (0.5-1.2 g/kg body weight) can maximize both muscle protein synthesis and glycogen resynthesis. The addition of anti-inflammatory ingredients can further promote regenerative processes [18, 21].

XIVb. Nutrition strategy on training day

Nutrition planning on training day should include all meals, not just the one immediately following exercise. The pre-workout meal, eaten 2-4 hours before exercise, should provide easily digestible carbohydrates and a moderate amount of protein, while minimizing fat and fiber, which can slow digestion [20].

During prolonged workouts (more than 60-90 minutes), carbohydrate and electrolyte supplementation may be necessary to maintain performance and demarcate muscle damage. It is recommended to consume 30-60g of carbohydrates per hour of exercise, preferring different sources (glucose+fructose) to maximize absorption [18, 20].

After training, in addition to the immediate recovery meal, it is important to maintain an adequate supply of nutrients for the next 24-48 hours. Regular protein-containing meals (every 3-4 hours) can support continued muscle protein synthesis and optimize training adaptations [18, 19].

XV. Individualizing the anti-inflammatory diet

XVa. Factors influencing nutritional needs

Individual athletes' nutritional needs can vary significantly depending on a number of factors, including age, gender, body composition, type of sport practiced and training intensity. Younger athletes may be characterized by higher resistance to oxidative stress and faster recovery, while older athletes may require greater antioxidant support [12, 13].

Regarding gender differences in metabolism, studies indicate that men may benefit more from omega-3 supplementation in the context of reducing inflammation, while women may show a different response to antioxidants depending on the phase of the menstrual cycle [12, 13].

Also, the type of sport practiced determines specific nutritional needs. Endurance athletes may require greater antioxidant support due to prolonged oxidative stress, while strength athletes may need an increased supply of ingredients that support muscle protein synthesis [8, 18].

XVb. Genetic polymorphisms and response to anti-inflammatory ingredients

Growing knowledge in the field of nutrigenomics indicates that genetic polymorphisms have a significant impact on the individual response to anti-inflammatory ingredients. Polymorphisms in genes encoding antioxidant enzymes, receptors for fatty acids and cytokines can determine the efficacy of particular dietary interventions [7, 12]. For example, polymorphisms in the

GSTT1 (glutathione S-transferase theta 1) gene may affect the body's ability to neutralize lipid peroxidation products, which may determine antioxidant needs. Similarly, variants in the FADS1 (fatty acid desaturase 1) gene may affect omega-3 fatty acid metabolism [7, 13].

Although genetic testing in the context of sports nutrition is still under development, future approaches may take into account an individual's genetic profile when designing nutritional strategies. Currently, a practical approach is to monitor individual response to various interventions and adjust protocols based on observed effects [12, 19].

XVc. Monitoring inflammatory markers

Objective monitoring of the effectiveness of an anti-inflammatory diet can include regular determination of markers of inflammation and antioxidant status. Basic markers include C-reactive protein (CRP), pro-inflammatory cytokines (TNF-α, IL-6) and markers of muscle damage (creatine kinase, myoglobin) [3, 10].

More advanced methods may include the determination of oxidative stress markers, such as malondialdehyde (MDA) and total antioxidant status (TAS). These parameters can provide valuable information about the effectiveness of dietary interventions and the need for modification [10, 12].

Practical monitoring can also include subjective assessments such as muscle pain scales, fatigue levels and sleep quality. These parameters, although less objective, can provide important information about the overall state of recovery and the effectiveness of the nutritional strategies used [9, 16].

XVI. Discussion

XVIa. Synthesis of scientific evidence

Analysis of the available scientific literature unequivocally demonstrates the potential of an anti-inflammatory diet as an effective tool to promote post-exercise recovery. Mechanisms of action include both direct modulation of the inflammatory response through inhibition of pro-inflammatory cytokines, as well as indirect effects related to improved mitochondrial function and enhancement of endogenous antioxidant systems [3, 6, 7].

The strongest scientific evidence concerns the use of omega-3 fatty acids, curcumin and tart cherry juice in the context of post-workout recovery. These ingredients show significant effects in reducing inflammatory markers and muscle damage, while improving performance parameters [3, 8, 10, 14].

However, it should be emphasized that the effectiveness of individual interventions may depend on a number of factors, including dose, timing and the type of training protocol used. Standardization of study methodology and identification of optimal protocols remains a challenge for future research [2, 4].

XVIb. Limitations and methodological challenges

Major limitations in interpreting the available evidence include the heterogeneity of study methodologies, differences in study populations, and the heterogeneity of the training protocols used [2, 3].

Bioavailability issues are challenging, especially for ingredients with known low absorption, such as curcumin. Differences in the formulations used can significantly affect the observed effects, making it difficult to compare the results of different studies [2, 3, 4].

Additionally, many studies focus on short-term effects, while the long-term implications of supplementation with anti-inflammatory ingredients remain poorly studied. It is particularly important to understand potential interactions with training adaptations and the impact on long-term athletic performance [12, 18].

XVIc. Practical implications

The practical application of an anti-inflammatory diet in post-workout recovery should be based on individual needs assessment and systematic monitoring of responses. The basis should be a balanced diet rich in natural sources of anti-inflammatory components, with selective supplementation in case of increased needs or dietary restrictions [6, 7, 21].

Key practical recommendations include regular consumption of fatty fish as a source of omega-3 fatty acids, inclusion of a variety of fruits and vegetables rich in antioxidants, and consideration of supplementation with curcumin or tart cherry juice during periods of intense training [8, 9, 10, 14].

Nutritional timing appears to be important, with an emphasis on providing anti-inflammatory components both before and after exercise. This strategy may maximize preventive effects and promote active recovery processes [17, 18, 21].

XVId. Directions for future research

Future research should focus on standardizing methodologies and determining optimal doses and protocols for the use of individual anti-inflammatory components. It is particularly important to conduct long-term studies to assess the safety and durability of the observed effects [2, 4].

The development of personalized sports medicine requires a better understanding of the factors that determine an individual's response to nutritional interventions. Nutrigenomics research can provide valuable information to optimize nutritional strategies for individual athletes [7, 12].

The integration of advanced technologies, such as metabolomics and proteomics, may enable a deeper understanding of the mechanisms of action of anti-inflammatory components and the identification of new biomarkers of the effectiveness of nutritional interventions [3, 4, 10].

XVII. Conclusions

The literature review conducted provides compelling evidence for the importance of an anti-inflammatory diet in optimizing recovery after exercise. Key components, including omega-3 fatty acids, curcumin, polyphenols from tart cherry juice, and resveratrol, have demonstrated documented effects in reducing inflammatory markers and accelerating recovery processes.

Mechanisms of action include modulation of key signaling pathways, including NF-κB inhibition, SIRT1 activation and enhancement of endogenous antioxidant systems. These molecular bases of action translate into clinically observed effects such as reduced muscle soreness, reduced recovery time and improved performance parameters.

The practical application of an anti-inflammatory diet requires an individual approach that takes into account the specifics of the sport practiced, the intensity of training and individual metabolic conditions. The basis should be natural sources of bioactive components, with selective supplementation when warranted.

Despite promising results, further research is needed aimed at standardizing protocols, determining optimal doses and evaluating long-term health effects. The development of personalized sports medicine based on individual genetic and metabolic profiles is a promising direction for future research.

The implementation of an anti-inflammatory diet in sports practice can significantly contribute to improving performance, reducing the risk of injury and improving the overall health of athletes. The key element for success is a systematic approach based on the latest scientific evidence and individual optimization of dietary strategies.

Disclosure

Author's Contribution:

Conceptualization: Maciej Bulwa, Monika Suszek

Methodology: Julia Surowaniec, Agnieszka Walus

Software: Adrianna Lysko, Julia Surowaniec

Check: Agnieszka Suszek

Formal analysis: Natalia Wieczorek-Durdzińska, Monika Suszek

Investigation: Adrianna Lysko

Resources: Małgorzata Filak , Angelika Złotnik

Data curation: Agata Zabierowska

Writing – rough preparation: Małgorzata Filak

Writing – review and editing: Angelika Złotnik

Visualization: Julia Surowaniec

Supervision: Małgorzata Filak, Angelika Złotnik

Project administration: Małgorzata Filak, Angelika Złotnik

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