

The **Missing Half** of Your Anti-Inflammatory Plan

A printable checklist for the areas most people overlook once their diet is already clean.

If you eat well but still feel tired, inflamed, or unwell, **diet is probably not your biggest lever anymore**. This checklist covers the stress and sleep factors that keep inflammatory markers elevated regardless of what you eat. Work through each section and tick what you are already doing. The gaps are where to start.

● SLEEP QUALITY

☐ Keep your bedroom cool, dark, and free of screens

Core body temperature needs to drop to initiate deep sleep. Even a small amount of light disrupts melatonin production.

☐ Go to bed and wake at the same time every day, including weekends

Consistent sleep timing is the single most effective way to improve sleep architecture. An irregular schedule keeps cortisol patterns disrupted.

☐ Stop eating at least two hours before bed

Digestion raises core body temperature and keeps insulin elevated. Both interfere with the deep sleep stages that produce the most anti-inflammatory repair.

☐ Avoid alcohol in the evening, even small amounts

Alcohol fragments REM sleep. It may help you fall asleep but consistently reduces sleep quality in the second half of the night.

☐ Get natural light within 30 minutes of waking

Morning light anchors your circadian rhythm and starts the cortisol curve at the right point in the day. This directly affects how well you sleep that night.

● STRESS AND CORTISOL

☐ Build a genuine wind-down window of at least 30 minutes before bed

Not a to-do list. Not your phone. Something that genuinely lowers your nervous system activation. Reading, a warm shower, or calm conversation all count.

☐ **Identify your single biggest daily cortisol trigger and reduce it by one step**

You do not need to eliminate stress. You need to lower the frequency with which your system stays activated. One specific change compounds over weeks.

☐ **Add a short midday reset of five to ten minutes with no inputs**

No phone, no news, no task-switching. A brief pause lowers afternoon cortisol and reduces the sleep disruption that elevated evening cortisol causes.

☐ **Limit news and social media to one defined window per day**

Unpredictable negative input is one of the most consistent drivers of low-level chronic cortisol. Batching it removes the drip feed.

Why this matters even if your diet is clean

Elevated cortisol increases intestinal permeability, which allows inflammatory compounds into the bloodstream that your gut would otherwise filter out. Poor sleep raises C-reactive protein and interleukin-6, two of the main inflammation markers, measurably and consistently. Ticking off items in these two sections directly reduces that load, often within two to three weeks.

● MOVEMENT AND RECOVERY

☐ **Walk for at least 20 minutes on most days, even gently**

Low-intensity movement triggers anti-inflammatory myokine release from muscle tissue. Intensity is not the goal. Consistency is.

☐ **Avoid intense exercise when you are already running on poor sleep**

High-intensity training raises inflammatory markers short-term. On a poor sleep base, your body cannot complete the recovery cycle, so the inflammation compounds rather than clears.

☐ **Take a 10-minute walk after your main meal**

Post-meal walking measurably blunts the blood glucose spike that follows eating. Lower glucose spikes mean lower insulin, and lower insulin directly reduces one of the key triggers for inflammatory signalling.