

## INFLAMMATION PART 2: ADOPTING AN ANTI-INFLAMMATORY LIFESTYLE

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In last month's article "*Understanding the Inflammatory Response*", we focused on identifying the major difference between natural, essential inflammation, and prolonged chronic inflammation. Inflammation is a natural biological process that is protective and restorative. It enables our bodies to defend against bacteria, viruses, parasites, environmental pollutants, and injury. Unfortunately, inflammation also has the potential to become excessive and uncontrolled, leading to chronic inflammation. Chronic inflammation has been linked to prolonged pain and many major health problems. This article will focus on natural lifestyle habits that can be employed to help minimize or eliminate chronic inflammation.

In the management of chronic inflammation, modern medical science has responded with the development of various drugs with anti-inflammatory properties that block different pathways within the inflammatory response. For some, the use of prescription or over-the-counter medication is required for everyday functioning, and crucial in the first stage of healing. For others, the use of anti-inflammatory medication should be monitored for any undesirable side effects. *A special caveat for all readers:* this article is not advocating stopping your prescriptions. It is advocating the use of natural solutions for the underlying cause or source of inflammation, wherever possible. Let's take a closer look at how diet, exercise, and healthy habits can promote an anti-inflammatory lifestyle.

When it comes to dietary habits, there are foods that promote inflammation in the body, and those that are anti-inflammatory. The typical North American diet is deficient in fruits and vegetables and contains excessive amounts of fatty meats, refined grain products, and dessert foods. Such a diet can have numerous adverse biochemical effects, all of which create a pro-inflammatory state and predispose the body to degenerative diseases. C-reactive protein (CRP) is a blood test used to measure inflammation in the body. High glycemic foods such as refined sugars and carbohydrates have been shown to be pro-inflammatory in the body. A recent study from the *Harvard Medical School* found that women who ate large amounts of high glycemic foods had very high CRP levels. Women who ate excessive amounts of these foods and were also overweight had the highest and most dangerous CRP levels. Avoiding foods that cause an allergic-type response in the body is also important in avoiding chronic inflammation.



Dietary trans-fats and most omega-6 fats, found in margarine, corn, and safflower oils have also been shown to have pro-inflammatory effects in the body. These fats are the basic building blocks for several key pro-inflammatory substances. In contrast, the more favorable omega-3 fats, which are found in fish and fish oils, have an inflammation-suppressing effect. Anti-oxidants, found in most fruits and vegetables, are natural compounds that help protect the body from harmful free radicals. Free radicals damage the DNA in the tissues of our body, which can cause accelerated aging, inflammation, and cancer. Anti-oxidants have also been shown to lower CRP levels. In addition to increasing our intake of fresh fruits and vegetables, supplementing our foods with other nutrients and enzymes may also help in combating inflammation. These include: vitamins C and E, curcumin, rosemary, ginger, quercetin, grape seed extract, devils claw, MSM, white willow bark, bromelain, L-glutamine, and proteolytic enzymes.



The health merits of regular exercise have scientifically been well documented. Exercise has the ability to positively affect every organ and structure in the body. Endorphins released by the body during exercise can have anti-inflammatory properties. Exercise also lowers CRP levels, regulates insulin levels and creates muscle, which helps the body regulate weight. A direct link can be made between an increase in CRP and an

increase in blood sugar levels. Being overweight increases inflammation in the body. Fat cells are efficient factories for producing key inflammatory elements, and burning calories shrinks those cells.

Adopting general good habits can also go a long way in minimizing inflammation in the body. Cigarette smoking is a major preventable contributor to chronic inflammation, and by no coincidence, disease and morbidity. Smokers, and those exposed to second hand smoke bombard their bodies with over 40 substances that cause, promote, or initiate cancer. Avoidance of exposure to pollution and toxic fumes will also help curb inflammation in the body. Regular flossing and brushing of your teeth can greatly reduce the risk of gum disease, which can be a source of chronic inflammation. Making sure you get enough sleep daily allows the body to recharge, recover, and recuperate. Prolonged stress, whether it is emotional or physical, can be a source of chronic inflammation. Finding an effective outlet or mechanism for dealing with stress is important for managing this source of inflammation. The stimulation of nerve fibers from chronic inflammation can be a significant contributor to pain. Many individuals have been able to achieve excellent pain relief from alternative therapies such as acupuncture, massage therapy, and chiropractic care for structural causes of pain and inflammation.



Due to the busy and hectic lifestyles we lead today, every individual has a degree of inflammation occurring in them at any given time. Keeping this inflammation in check and avoiding chronic inflammation is key. Calming the inflammation fire is a constant process that involves pro-active choices. As the link between chronic inflammation and disease becomes more apparent, so does the need for adopting an anti-inflammatory lifestyle.

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