

Inflammation and Diet

Inflammation is an important part of the healing process following an injury. It is easy to see inflammation taking place when we have an injury, with the area becoming noticeably red, warm, and swollen. Inflammation also occurs during infection and immunologic reactions, and is sometimes a part of our genetic predisposition.

The problem occurs when chronic inflammation occurs inside our bodies, and we can not see it. Acute inflammation leads to repair of the tissue, but chronic inflammation does not allow for this repair and healing. Inflammation is a cause of many diseases, such as rheumatoid arthritis, diverticulosis, Crohn's disease, some kidney diseases, chronic skin problems, and cardiovascular disease. Acute inflammation leads to repair of the tissue, but chronic inflammation does not allow for this repair and healing.

Medical tests

The most popular laboratory test used to confirm inflammation is the C-reactive protein test (CRP). CRP is produced from a protein known as interleukin-6. Interleukin-6 is increased during inflammation and signals the immune system. However, the CRP test can not diagnose where in the body, or why, the inflammation is occurring.

Preventing inflammation

The first step is to make sure that you get enough sleep. Researchers have found that skimping on your shut-eye can increase the level of stress hormones and CRP in our blood. Frequent exercise and smoking cessation also appear to help, as does practicing stress reduction techniques, such as meditation or yoga. In addition, it appears crucial to maintain a normal body weight.

A healthy diet

As part of your healthy diet, you should eat the following each week:

- 2-3 servings of fatty fish, such as:
 - Tuna
 - Salmon
 - Mackerel
 - Trout
 - Sardines
- Several servings of:
 - Green leafy vegetables
 - Flaxseed
 - Canola oil

Omega-3 fatty acids

The omega-3 fatty acids in these foods appear to lower the production of inflammatory proteins. Research has shown that a diet high in omega-3 fatty acids may decrease inflammation to the same extent that aspirin and other nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory

medications do. Some experts hypothesize that omega-6 fat, found in chicken, beef, corn oil, and safflower oil, actually leads to inflammation.

Selenium and zinc

Foods high in selenium and zinc may help as well.

Selenium is found in:

- Grains
- Onions
- Meat
- Milk

Zinc is found in:

- Oysters
- Shellfish
- Herring
- Liver
- Legumes
- Milk
- Wheat bran

Vitamins C, E, and A

Vitamins C, E, and A also are useful antioxidants in the fight against inflammation.

Vitamin C is found in:

- Yellow peppers
- Citrus fruits and juices
- Broccoli
- Brussels sprouts
- Strawberries
- Cantaloupe
- Tomatoes

The highest content of vitamin E is found in plant products, such as vegetables, fruits, grains, and oils. Good food sources of vitamin A are dark green leafy and yellow-orange fruits and vegetables. Especially rich sources include:

- Carrots
- Greens
- Spinach
- Orange juice
- Sweet potatoes
- Cantaloupe

Fiber and antioxidants

In general, the more fruits, vegetables, nuts (especially almonds and pecans), and dried beans that you eat, the better. These foods are high in fiber, which helps to normalize the inflammatory response that often occurs following a rapid increase or decrease in blood

sugar levels. They also are high in antioxidants, which is good for people with inflammation. It is believed that supplement usage can not replicate the benefits garnered from eating a diet rich in fruits and vegetables. As many as seven servings of fruits and vegetables a day often is recommended. Dark chocolate, fresh herbs, and tea also are high in antioxidants and recommended.

Foods to limit or avoid

- Eat chicken, lean meats, and omega-3 eggs in moderation, even though they are good sources of protein
- Use caution when consuming sugar, which has a possible connection to inflammation
- Avoid enriched grains and choose whole grains instead (according to some sources)

In general, avoid any diet that recommends foregoing an entire food group. Remember, no definitive research exists to show that all grains are detrimental to our inflammatory response. In addition, many people are selling supplements that claim they will end your problems with inflammation. Evaluate these advertisements carefully. Whole foods are always the best choice.

References and recommended readings

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