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Inflammation: What to Eat to Reduce Your Risk of Many Diseases

by Hesh Goldstein

Inflammation is a double-edged sword. While it is very critical for the healing of wounds, it is also a bodily response that can become too much of a good thing. Any infection, injury or toxicity problem inflicted on our bodies is handled by the inflammatory response that occurs automatically. Unfortunately, if certain substances in our bodies become unbalanced, the inflammation switch can come "on" at the wrong time or forget to go "off" when no longer needed.

When inflammation occurs, it can be seen externally as a rash or swelling. A more dangerous kind is that which occurs internally. If it goes on too long it can cause damage to any organ or organ system. People with auto-immune and chronic inflammatory diseases are very familiar with the problems inflammation can cause.

Diseases in which inflammation plays a role are heart disease, stroke, Alzheimer's, cancers, arthritis, gingivitis and other "itis" disorders.

On the positive side, since the growth in such diseases can be correlated with and related to our increased diets of fast, convenient foods, it is possible to end the inflammation process with a change in diet.

Not only do we need to eliminate saturated and trans-fats, refined sugars, starches, commercial meats and artificial sweeteners, but we can reverse problems of chronic inflammatory diseases by choosing certain foods and herbs available at the grocery store.

It is being shown time and again that the common therapy for inflammation - pharmaceuticals - has been a miserable and costly failure. Rather than submit your body to the side effects of such drugs, please consider the much healthier alternatives discussed below.

Dietary polyphenols, found in many edible plants, are being found to have anti-inflammatory properties. Studies on animals in the lab have demonstrated such properties, and studies done on different human populations have shown that those who consume polyphenol-rich foods have lower incidences of inflammatory disease.

Fruits rich in this phytochemical include blackberries, blueberries, strawberries, raspberries, sour cherries, pomegranates and cranberries. If you drink these in juices, make sure to read the label and avoid any with sugar added.

Another group of dietary nutrients receiving much publicity today are the omega fatty acids. Don't be confused by the wording here. Omega-3 fatty acids are anti-inflammatory, while omega-6 acids can actually help cause inflammation. That is why we need to balance the use of omega-6's with omega-3's. If your diet has been

predominantly rich in the omega-6 oils, you will have to do more than achieve a balance by increasing omega-3's and drastically reducing the omega-6's.

Other foods rich in omega-3's include hemp, flax, pumpkin seeds, walnuts and their oils; high-fiber, non-starchy vegetables such as dark leafy salad greens, spinach, kale, tomatoes, broccoli, cauliflower, collard greens, and onions. Actually, an incredible supplement called "O-Mega Zen3" works wonders. It lately has been promoted by Oprah Winfrey and has been selling out across the country.

We often overlook the turnip, but from a Chinese medicinal view, it and the radish both aid digestion by cooling and soothing inflammation and phlegm.

Quercetin is a flavonoid, and a very powerful one. It is found in red grapes, red and yellow onions, garlic, broccoli and apples.

Anti-oxidant properties in some foods also help fight inflammation by protecting the body from free radicals. Vitamin C-rich foods fall into this category, including carrots, orange winter squash, bell peppers and tomatoes.

To reduce swelling and inflammation quickly, eat half of a fresh pineapple or papaya daily. Pineapple contains the enzyme bromelain and papaya contains papain. Pain and swelling should go down in two to six days.

Eating at least five servings of such fresh fruits and vegetables daily is a minimum. If inflammation is a problem, it is recommended to increase the intake of this food group. In fact, some natural health experts advise a diet that is 75% raw foods.

The flavorings and herbs used in cooking your lean meats and fish are very important as well in fighting inflammation. Turmeric, and its yellowing substance curcumin, are most commonly found in Indian foods like curry and in mustards. The author makes capsules of grocery store-bought turmeric, which has helped with arthritis symptoms. At least one naturopath has stated it works much like anti-inflammatory pharmaceuticals, without the side effects.

Ginger is another flavoring that has many healthful properties, one of which is an anti-inflammatory.

Garlic has been the object of much research and has been shown to inhibit the growth of 23 organisms, including bacteria, mold and yeast. It is also very helpful as an anti-inflammatory.

Remember, while adding spices like turmeric, it is just as important to decrease, if not eliminate, flavorings such as salt, sugar and artificial sweeteners. Also avoid colas, white flour products and junk foods.

Just one precaution: Herbs and spices should be used with medical supervision if one is also taking medications because their medicinal properties can interfere with the drugs.

When it comes to soy and soy products, the advice and research findings are contradictory. More research is needed on these foods.

In conclusion, if you want to reduce inflammation, eat healthier. Replace your processed foods with meals like tofu, salads, and steamed vegetables. Avoid deep-fried foods and hydrogenated oils. Bake or stir-fry instead of frying. Use olive oil, an omega-9 fatty acid, instead of corn and related oils.

Aloha!