



Reducing Inflammation Can Slow the Biological Clock

By Gerard L. Guillory, M.D.

Inflammation is a natural and vital part of the body's response to injury, helping fight infection and ward off cancer cells, but it can go awry.

The redness and swelling that occur when a splinter lodges itself in your fingertip exemplify acute inflammation. Your immune system is attempting to rid the body of a foreign invader.

Most of us, however, also experience chronic low-grade inflammation, which occurs at the cellular level. This isn't the result of your body's trying to protect itself. Poor diet, lack of exercise and ineffective responses to stress contribute to the problem. Many age-related illnesses and obesity arise as a result of excessive, chronic cellular inflammation.

Reducing chronic inflammation can help you slow the biological clock and delay or, in some cases, reverse the aging process. Changing your diet, engaging in regular exercise and managing stress more effectively are critical parts of any plan to achieve these goals..

Change your diet

Some foods are pro-inflammatory and others are anti-inflammatory. Knowing the difference and opting for healthier foods will help you look and feel better. Generally, foods have four distinct properties that merit your consideration.

- **Type and amount of fat.** Some fats are essential to good health. For example, the Omega-3 fatty acids that are found in fish oil, cod liver oil and flaxseed are anti-inflammatory. In contrast, foods that contain saturated fats and trans fats are pro-inflammatory. I recommend that you avoid trans fats completely.
- **Glycemic index.** This is a measure of how rapidly the body converts food to sugar. The faster it does so, the more pro-inflammatory the food. Avoid foods that contain sugar or that are rapidly converted to sugar in the body. Examples include white-flour products, white potatoes, pasta and other low-fiber, starchy foods. To learn more about where particular food items rank, check out www.nutritiondata.com.
- **Phytonutrient content.** Phytonutrients are vitamins, trace elements, and micronutrients found notably in plants, grains, nuts and fruits. They promote healthy cellular growth and reduce inflammation. Organic produce, grown in composted soil, tends to be richer in these anti-inflammatory compounds than are commercially grown foods, which use chemical fertilizers. Cooking with a

microwave destroys most phytonutrients. Think about it for a moment: Would you nuke your multi-vitamin before taking it?

- Anti-inflammatory compounds. Some herbs, spices and other food items contain compounds that are natural anti-inflammatory substances. Turmeric and ginger, for example, fight inflammation. Cinnamon also has beneficial properties and helps prevent rapid rises in your body's blood-sugar level.

Engage in appropriate exercise and learn to manage stress

No single workout regimen meets all needs, but a combination of resistance or weight training and aerobic exercise is probably appropriate for most people. How much and how often will depend on your health condition and your goals. Before you start a particular workout regimen, consult with a trainer and with your doctor.

With practice, you can replace self-defeating responses to stress with healthier responses such as deep-breathing exercises, meditation or yoga. These will help you manage the “fight or flight” reaction that you naturally experience when stressed.

Knowledge is the key

Healthy lifestyle changes require two things on your part: motivation and knowledge. In my medical practice, I often encounter highly motivated patients who are taking steps to improve their health but their actions sometimes have the opposite effect.

For example, many people have read of the beneficial effects of eating fish, so they regularly eat salmon. But not all salmon are equal. Farm-raised Atlantic salmon is pro-inflammatory, whereas wild Pacific Northwest salmon is anti-inflammatory.

The problem is that farm-raised salmon are fed corn- and soy-based products, which are high in unhealthy fats. Recent research has indicated that some of these feeds also contain herbicides and pesticides. Wild salmon, in contrast, are naturally high in Omega-3 fatty acids and low in unhealthy fats. The meat is pink—not dyed, like farm-raised salmon—and tends to be firmer and more flavorful.

The more you know about inflammation, the better-prepared you are to make healthy choices. For an in-depth look at inflammation, please join us at our next seminar. The date is to be determined. I hope to see you there.

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