

Inflammation: The Internal Fire that is the Root-Cause of Many Modern Ills



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What do the following conditions have in common: Aging, Arthritis, Pain, Cardio-Vascular Disease, Gastro-Intestinal Dysfunction, Depression, Alzheimers, Endocrine Dysfunction, Osteoporosis and Autoimmune Diseases such as Ulcerative Colitis, Hypothyroidism, Lupus, Multiple Sclerosis, Diabetes (Types I and II), Cancer and others?

If your answer was "They all are chronic diseases treated by drugs that you take for the rest of your life", while correct, is not the answer I was looking for! A more helpful answer is that *inflammation* is a critical contributor, if not the root cause, of each condition. There has been a recent explosion of information about the role of inflammation in illness and aging, and how it effects virtually every tissue of the body.

Two conventional blood tests, Homocysteine and C Reactive Protein (CRP) measure proteins that are markers for inflammation, especially of the cardiovascular ("CV") system. If elevated, they indicate a higher risk of CV disease. However, in many people with softer signs of inflammation, such as fatigue, joint pain and stiffness, poor skin healing, sluggishness of memory, cognition and mood, and most of the other things we call "aging", these conventional tests may not reveal an abnormality.

The conventional treatment for inflammation is drugs. If the joints are "inflamed", a NSAID (Non Steroidal Anti Inflammatory Drug) such as Motrin, Alleve, or one of the newer ones are prescribed. If it is inflammation of the CV system, as revealed by the blood tests above, especially if coupled with high cholesterol, then a statin drug is used. The statin drugs not only lower bad (pro-inflammatory) cholesterol and raise good (anti-inflammatory) cholesterol, they also lower CRP. Some think that the lowering of the CRP is more important than the lowering of cholesterol.

The problem with most of the drugs is that they incompletely suppress inflammation without getting to the root cause. In addition, most drugs will cause side effects which require other drugs or cause other illnesses, some of which are worse than the original problem. For example, the recent scare about Vioxx and Celebrex involve drugs that were designed to be used chronically for pain and inflammation.

However, the risks outweighed the benefits.

It surprises me how many people "miss their Vioxx", willing to risk a heart attack or stroke to achieve pain relief, when there are so many other options available.

The holistic community has been offering "alternative" treatments for inflammation for over a decade with equal, if not better success than these drugs. And the treatments don't just suppress symptoms, they often get to the root cause. In addition, the same alternative modalities that help with inflammation will also prevent other diseases, increase energy, quality of life, restful sleep, and a host of other benefits. These modalities have *positive side effects*. Before getting onto these modalities, it's important to understand more about inflammation.

What is Inflammation

It is helpful to think of inflammation as a fire. Just like the fire in our furnace or stove, inflammation is very useful. It kills invading bacteria, viruses, yeast, and cancer cells. It takes apart dysfunctional tissues, such as bone and muscle, which allows them to be rebuilt stronger and better. A similar fire burns fuel in each cell to generate energy.

However, just like fire, if inflammation is not contained, it can rapidly spread and beget more inflammation. Just like the fumes and tiny sparks coming from a fire, can ignite an inferno, the "free radicals" generated by the inflammatory process can attack virtually every tissue of the body in a domino-like cascade. Such tissues include brain (depression and dementia), blood vessels (hypertension, cardiovascular disease), endocrine glands (thyroid disease, diabetes), and bone (osteoporosis, arthritis), just to name a few.

What Causes Inflammation

Inflammatory cells and molecules in our body can be turned on and off by multiple factors. While there is a current trend to "blame our genes", the vast majority of inflammation, more than 80%, is caused by lifestyle. This is because genes are like switches or seeds--they can be turned on or off depending

upon their environment. There have been thousands of scientifically valid studies demonstrating our ability to modify gene expression. One of the most convincing proofs is that identical twins, living different lifestyles, or in different countries, can have opposite levels of inflammation. If they switch lifestyles, the level of inflammation reverses.

Causes of inflammation include: poor sleep, chronic stress, constipation, overuse of antibiotics, antacids and anti-inflammatory medications, lack of balanced nutrients in the diet, emphasis of animal proteins and fats in the diet, and lack of proper exercise and spiritual work.

Holistic Treatment of Inflammation

Holistic treatment should start with a medical evaluation, including routine testing. This is important, because if the inflammation is severe or advanced, medications may be necessary for a while to keep the fire contained while alternative measures are implemented.

Alternative modalities include: education about lifestyle and stress reduction, elimination of toxic foods, addition of core supplements, improvement of digestive and bowel functions, yoga and meditation, acupuncture, body work, sleep hygiene, and psycho-spiritual work. While any one modality can help, a balanced program using several modalities working together, like the instruments in a symphony orchestra, will work much better. In the long-term, such a program is vastly safer and cheaper than what we are paying for health insurance, drugs, and doctors visits. More importantly, by investing in these modalities, you can accumulate health, just like you accumulate wealth for retirement.

IMPORTANT NOTE: This general information should not be used to make decisions about medical care without the involvement of a knowledgeable practitioner.

For More Information

- o See my previous articles in Yoga Living on; Detoxification, Elimination and Simplification and What We Really Need
- o My website, www.c4oh.org, has helpful articles on related topics
- o Challem, Jack: [The Inflammation Syndrome: The Complete Nutritional Program to Prevent and Reverse Heart Disease, Arthritis, Diabetes, Allergies, and Asthma](#). NY: Wiley, 2003. ISBN

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- o Schwarzbein, Diana: [The Schwarzbein Principle Program](#). Health Communications, 2004. ISBN 0757-302-270.
- o Bland, Jeffrey: [The 20-Day Rejuvenation Diet Program](#). Los Angeles: Keats, 1999. ISBN 0879-839-805.
- o Pizzorno, Joseph: [Total Wellness: Improve Your Health by Understanding and Cooperating with Your Body's Natural Healing Systems](#). Prima Publishing, 1997, ISBN 0761-510-94X.
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- o Hanley, JL et al: [Tired of Being Tired](#). New York: Putnam, 2001. ISBN 0399-147-497.
- o Cameron, Julia: [The Artist's Way: A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity](#). Penguin, 1992. ISBN 0874-776-945.
- o Sivananda Center: [The Sivananda Companion to Yoga](#). New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983. ISBN: 0684-87000-2.
- o Lasater, Judith P.T. Ph.D.: [Relax and Renew: Restful Yoga for Stressful Times](#). Rodmell Press, 1995. ISBN: 0962-713-848.

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