

The York University Staff Association Health and Wellness News and Views

When most people think of inflammation, an image of a swollen joint such as a sprained ankle pops in mind. But this is not the only kind of inflammation. Inflammation is a part of the body's immune response to a multitude of harmful invaders. It is the basic way in which the body reacts to infection. If inflammation remains beyond the time needed for the body to repair, it can become chronic and cause pain, discomfort and ultimately damage the body. The inflammation process sends out several soldiers in the form of white blood cells that act as protecting agents when the body is being attacked. However in some diseases the body triggers an inflammatory response when there are no foreign substances to fight off. In these diseases called autoimmune diseases, the body's normally protective immune system causes damage to its own tissues. Foods high in sugar and saturated fat can spur inflammation. They cause over activity in the immune system, which can lead to joint pain, fatigue, and damage to blood vessels. Unfortunately today's go-go-go lifestyle creates a breeding ground for chronic inflammation to develop.

Health professionals have always recommended a healthy diet rich in natural anti-oxidants and plenty of good old water as being good ways to help manage inflammation. Water in particular is recommended because it flushes toxins and other irritants out of our systems. However you need to drink plenty of water for it to be effective. Water also acts as a lubricant that keeps the joints and disks (cushion between the bones) pliable. Your body uses the water you drink first to supply vital organs, the bones and joints are the last to receive the water they need. Therefore you must drink plenty of water throughout the day. Unfortunately in today's society too many of us replace fluids by drinking pop, coffee, and other highly acidic drinks

Oily fish, such as salmon, mackerel, tuna, and sardines are high in omega-3 fatty acids. This type of fat contains powerful anti-inflammatory properties that have been shown to be beneficial in helping those with heart disease, arteriosclerosis, depression, attention deficit disorder and allergies. Not a fan of fish? Consider fish-oil supplements. Symptoms of omega3 fatty acid deficiency include fatigue, poor memory, dry skin, heart problems, mood swings, depression, and poor circulation.

Professionals recommend eating fish 2 times per week.

Onions and garlic are not just for flavouring your favourite dishes. They are low in calories, have virtually no fat and are loaded with healthful components that fight inflammation. They are also rich in antioxidants that clean up free radicals in your body's cells before they have a chance to cause harm. Being antimicrobial, garlic and onions are great immunity boosters. Simply increase garlic and onion consumption at the first sign of illness to help ward off viruses and bacteria. They can also ward off infections including urinary tract infections. Due to the high levels of chromium, they can also fight against diabetes by improving glucose tolerance and lowering insulin levels. Strong smell=Strong powers.

Like onions and garlic, turmeric and ginger contain compounds that function in much the same way as anti-inflammatory medications such as aspirin or ibuprofen. Both ginger and turmeric are two of the most extensively researched medical spices. They protect the liver from toxins and effectively kill numerous bacteria and yeasts. Turmeric the ingredient that gives curry its yellow colour, works in the body by helping turn off NF-kappa B, a protein that regulates the immune system and triggers the process of inflammation.

Many of the phytonutrients found in olives have well-documented anti-inflammatory properties. The anti-inflammatory benefits of olives have been given special attention in the area of Heart Health. In heart patients, olives have been determined to lower blood levels of C-reactive protein. C-reactive protein (CPR) is widely used for the likelihood of unwanted inflammation. People who eat a traditional Mediterranean diet (which is rich in olives) seem to have fewer health conditions related to inflammation. In fact it has also been shown that extra virgin olive oil contains compounds similar to ibuprofen, making it a great oil for cooking, or in recipes like salad dressings. It is important to choose cold pressed to ensure the most potent benefits. To avoid excess calories, use extra virgin olive oil in lieu of other fats such as butter.

All fruits can help fight inflammation, because they are low in calories and fat and high in antioxidants.

Berries in particular have a wide variety of health benefits from anti cancer effects to improving wound healing. They also have phytochemicals that can prevent and even reverse the inflammation process. It is easy to eat a variety of berries as they tend to be accessible year round and are delicious. In the winter frozen berries are a great option. Whether you take the incentive to get creative with a recipe or simply pop them in your mouth ou natural, ask yourself... Did you get your serving of berries today? Your body will THANK YOU.

Remember the inflammation reaction itself is not always a bad thing. Problems arise when inflammation becomes chronic. Adding these foods that contain natural ant-inflammatory properties three to four times per week will improve your overall health. Adding exercise and proper hydration will also keep your body in fine shape saving inflammation for when it is really needed.

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