Are You Burning Up Your Body's Resources?

Dr. Lorraine Parker shares specific herbs and other tips that can help soothe your inflammation.

"What does a stubbed toe or a splinter in a finger have to do with your risk of developing Alzheimer's disease, suffering a heart attack or succumbing to colon cancer?" That was the question posed by a recent article in Time magazine. The consensus of current medical opinion states that a stubbed toe, Alzheimer's disease, heart disease and colon cancer are related.

The symptoms of acute inflammation, whether from a splinter or stubbed toe, are swelling, tenderness, redness and localized heat. You know you've been wounded because it hurts. Furthermore, inflammation is beneficial. The cascade of potent chemicals released by vigilant armies of immune system cells prevents a mere splinter from killing you. These sentinels patrol the body, waging chemical and biological warfare against invading armies of bacteria, viruses and parasites that attempt to organize a sneak attack almost daily. It's the inflammatory process that's your lifesaver!

However, occasionally the inflammatory process goes awry and doesn't shut off, usually in areas of the body that the immune cells can't necessarily easily access due to local tissue swelling that impedes circulation, e.g. periodontal disease or the lining (endothelium) of coronary arteries. The cascade of potent chemicals released from immune system cells churns out a toxic brew that the body that the immune cells can't necessarily access due to local tissue swelling that impedes circulation, e.g. periodontal disease or the lining (endothelium) of coronary arteries. The cascade of potent chemicals released from immune system cells churns out a toxic brew that enters the general circulation. You can go about your daily life oblivious to the chronic systemic inflammation that is simmering. Furthermore, the symptoms of chronic systemic inflammation, including chronic fatigue, vague muscle pains, poor appetite, occasional weight loss, sleepiness and depression, are non-specific, meaning they're general in nature and are also associated with many other medical conditions.

This behind-the-scenes battle within your body may eventually even claim you as its victim. After years of slowly simmering, chronic, low-grade infections and resulting inflammation can overwhelm the body's immune system reserves and transform to chronic diseases, including heart disease, heart attacks, cancer, Alzheimer's disease, diabetes, inflammatory bowel disease, arthritis, asthma or psoriasis. Furthermore, large amounts of damaging free radicals are also produced from inflamed tissues.

So, how can you stop inflammation from burning up your body's resources? Here are a few simple steps you can take that may help.

HAVE HERBS DOUSE THE FIRE

Boswellia is an Ayurvedic plant that contains anti-inflammatory substances called boswellic acids. These acids reduce inflammation by inhibiting two of the pro-inflammatory chemical messengers. When purchasing boswellia, look for boswellia extract that is standardized to 65 percent boswellic acids to assure potency.

Turmeric is indigenous to South India and Indonesia and is recommended for all inflammatory disorders. It's a common ingredient in curry powder. When purchasing turmeric, look for whole turmeric (at right), as it's more effective than isolated curcumin, its major constituent. And, purchase products that are standardized to 95 percent curcuminoids to assure potency.

Cat's claw is indigenous to the Amazon rainforest and other tropical areas of South and Central America. Its active substances contribute anti-inflammatory, anti-oxidant and anti-cancer properties. Many herbal formulas combine cat's claw with other plants and natural products for increased absorption and bioavailability. When purchasing cat's claw, look for products made from the inner bark that are standardized to three percent alkaloids and 15 percent phenols.

EAT RIGHT TO STAY COOL

Fats: Limit your daily intake of saturated fat found in meat, eggs and dairy products, as well as the omega-6 fats found in vegetable oils like corn, sunflower, safflower, soybean and cottonseed. The fat in these foods and oils contains arachidonic acid, which can result in the production of pro-inflammatory chemical messengers.

Instead, include omega-3 fats in your diet. Omega-3 fats are found in flaxseeds, wheat germ and fatty fish such as salmon, mackerel, lake trout and sardines. These fats supply the anti-inflammatory building blocks of alpha linolenic acid (ALA), which is in flaxseed. Eicosapentaenoic (EPA) acid and docosahexaenoic (DHA) acid are found only in fatty fish. It's a good idea to include fatty fish in your diet and arrange your plate to look like a colorful rainbow.

TEST TO DETECT

A simple blood test can determine how inflamed you really are. The test measures your C-reactive protein (CRP) level, which is a marker for inflammation that is produced by the liver in response to inflammation anywhere in the body. The test won't tell you where the fire is, just that there is one. Each laboratory has its own optimal CRP reference range. Your doctor's interpretation of this test combined with a history and physical exam can help determine if you are chronically inflamed or not.
Are You Burning Up... continued from page 25

your diet because some people cannot convert the
ALA in flaxseeds to the protective and more easily
utilized EPA/DHA. If you don’t like fish or don’t
eat it at least three to four times a week, omega-3
fatty acid supplements are recommended. Look for
supplements that contain EPA and DHA fatty acids
and that have been tested as not having mercury
contamination by a reliable third-party lab. Take
between one and four capsules daily.

Even though eating salmon will enhance your
body’s production of anti-inflammatory chemical
messengers, it must be wild salmon and not farmed
salmon. According to the USDA, a four-ounce
portion of farmed salmon contains liberal amounts
of the building blocks to make pro-inflammatory
chemical messengers. However, the same portion
of wild salmon contains almost none.

Fruits and Vegetables: Arrange your plate to look
like a colorful rainbow. Include generous amounts of
dark and colorful fruits and vegetables. These hued
gems contain abundant amounts of antioxidants to
neutralize the free radical by-products produced by
chronic inflammation. Remember, the darker the
color, the more antioxidants!

Carbohydrates: Eat carbohydrates rated with a
low to moderate value on the glycemic index.
The glycemic index rates a food as to how quickly
its sugar is absorbed and how high blood sugar
is expected to rise after it is eaten. Foods with a
high glycemic index cause a rapid rise in blood
sugar levels and a rapid release of insulin from the
pancreas. These high levels of glucose and insulin
are linked to the production of pro-inflammatory
chemical messengers.

EXERCISE TO COOL DOWN

Because fat cells produce pro-inflammatory
chemicals, exercise is a great way to limit
inflammation by reducing the body’s fat reserves.

BRUSH AND FLOSS DAILY
TO EXTINGUISH THE FLAME

Persistent gum disease is a major contributor to
chronic inflammation. Therefore, brushing and
flossing daily can reduce your risk of gum disease
and inflammation.

In addition to seeking medical attention for symptoms
that concern you, awareness of and education about
the inflammatory underpinnings of chronic disease
along with the lifestyle changes mentioned here can
help contain chronic inflammation.

Sources: Win the War Within by Floyd H. Chilton, Ph.D., The
Inflammation Syndrome by Jack Challem, Women to Women
(www.womentowomen.com) search “inflammation,” and The
Glycemic Index (www.glycemicindex.com)

Dr. Lorraine Parker is a chiropractor and nutritional consultant. She is open-
ing the Rejuvenation Medicine Center in Asheville in the summer of 2008.
Dr. Parker creates individualized lifestyle programs that focus on realigning,
rebalancing and rejuvenating your body and brain, and she can be reached
at 828-298-7902 or www.agingyouthfully.com.