Helping Your Body Heal Itself

In the last issue of The American Chiropractor, I related the story of my ruptured disc and the nutritional protocol of proteolytic enzymes that I used to recover and avoid surgery. I also promised that, in this issue, I would deal with some of the other nutrients I used to help accelerate the healing process. While the enzymes played a major role in my turnaround from an acute debilitating condition, the healing process occurring after inflammation places a great demand on the body’s store of nutrients. I incorporated a variety of nutrients into my nutritional protocol to facilitate healing and recovery and help me return to normal function. I returned to the gym and started working out and lifting weights again, less than two months after my “turnaround”, and I believe that the additional nutrients I was taking allowed for a speedy recovery. Here, I’d like to address those nutrients.

Vitamin C

First of all, the old standby, vitamin C. Even though I did my PhD research on this particular vitamin, I needed a chiropractor friend in Calgary, Canada, (Dr. Ian Smith) to remind me that I needed to add it to my protocol. Vitamin C is needed, sometimes in high doses, for tissue repair and toxin/debris cleanup. It is carried to the site of inflammation by the white blood cells, and helps the white blood cells accomplish their phagocytic duties of mopping up foreign material. I took 1,000 mgs three times a day during the acute phase, when I was trying to avoid surgery, and then reduced that dosage to 500 mgs a day in the recovery stage. I get asked frequently about vitamin C, and whether or not it is a “whole food” vitamin C. There are many good synergistic combination formulas which contain vitamin C from food sources such as rose hips, or the sago palm. However, you would need a wheelbarrow full of rosehips to get 1,000 mgs of vitamin C. You could even go to a food source, like an orange, for vitamin C in its purely natural form. Unfortunately, a disruption of the homeostasis of the body usually requires more than the vitamin punch of an orange. Ever wondered why the only studies showing positive effects on viral infections are studies in which doses over a gram have been used? There is a time and a place for high dose vitamin C. It is not needed for daily maintenance; but, if you have a situation such as acute disk inflammation or infection, vitamin C will be usurped by the body almost as quickly as it is taken. Use a vitamin C from a reputable source; including the bioflavonoids with it offers a beneficial and synergistic effect.

Minerals

Calcium, magnesium, and manganese are all highly important for soft tissue growth and repair. Calcium helps transport essential minerals to the site of inflammation. After periods of trauma, the system tends to be alkaline, and it is important for an acid-calcium to deliver healing nutrients to binding sites. An acid environment makes the insoluble calcium salts in the body soluble and ionizes them (calcium has to be ionized in the intestines in order to be absorbed). For example, calcium aspartate and calcium citrate are acidic calciums. Acidifying the system will work on dissolving bone spurs, but more on that in the next issue!

Magnesium “plays a crucial role in connective fibers with elastic properties.”1 When the ratios of magnesium and calcium are looked at in relation to elastic tissues, a ratio in favor of magnesium is found to be correlated with increased elasticity. It is even believed by some that disc herniation is brought on by extreme aging of collagen.2 Magnesium can increase the solubility and retention of calcium; it is depleted in conditions of inflammation, but is integral to the healing process. Magnesium has also been shown to decrease swelling.3

Manganese is an important component of Manganese Superoxide Dismutase (MnSOD), which battles the damaging free radicals that cause swelling. Immediately after trauma, the body starts coding for more MnSOD to be produced. Repletion of manganese after inflammatory trauma is necessary to keep up the free radical defense system.3

Anti-inflammatory Nutrients

Herbs such as ginger, turmeric, and boswellia are anti-inflammatory, as are bioflavonoids (especially quercetin and grape seed extract). Herbs like valerian, skullcap, and passionflower calm the central nervous system, and can be used to help ameliorate the symptoms of pain and inflammation.

Ginger, which is an herb known mostly for its therapeutic effect in nausea, actually has powerful abilities to combat inflammation, and these anti-inflammatory effects are well-backed by scientific studies. Ginger contains phenolic compounds that inhibit the enzymes responsible for generating important mediators of pain and inflammation in more than one pathway.4 Unlike some of the drugs that dam-
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age the intestinal lining, ginger is a digestive aid that soothes and relaxes the intestinal tract.

Turmeric has demonstrated excellent anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties, especially curcumin, which is the active component of turmeric that is responsible for the yellow pigment. The anti-inflammatory properties are due to the ability of curcumin to reduce histamine levels and possibly increase natural cortisol production by the adrenal glands.

Boswellia serrata is reported to have strong analgesic (pain-relieving) effects, along with anti-inflammatory and antiarthritic activity. Clinical trials in India report beneficial results on arthritic patients, and boswellic acids are marketed as antiarthritic drugs in India.

The Importance of Liver Nutrients in Resolving Inflammation
The connection of the liver to inflammation is sometimes forgotten; however, the liver is highly important in controlling inflammation. The liver has to clear immune complexes, and also clears the waste and toxins of inflammation. It’s similar to a bucket brigade; if the liver isn’t clearing toxins efficiently, the body can’t dump the waste products of inflammation, which, in turn, attracts more white blood cells to the site and increases inflammation. Several liver nutrients can help this process. Additionally, the liver is also responsible for the major production of proteins, which make up the antibodies of the immune system.

Milk thistle has always had a strong reputation for supporting liver function and pathways of detoxification. It increases the removal of wastes and toxins, which is crucial in decreasing inflammation. Silymarin, one of the main ingredients in milk thistle, has an anti-inflammatory effect on blood platelets, and the ability to inhibit free radical production and leukotriene synthesis means that it prevents the powerful, inflammatory leukotrienes from wreaking havoc in the body. Silybin, the most active ingredient in silymarin, has a steroid structure that is able to regenerate liver cells by stimulating DNA/RNA synthesis. The ability to stabilize cell membranes may explain the inhibition of histamine release from basophils, giving silymarin yet another anti-inflammatory property. Glutathione is a potent liver antioxidant, and a conjugating agent (binds toxins in the liver for removal).

That about sums up the antioxidant nutrients (in addition to the proteolytic enzymes) that I took to accelerate my goal of complete recovery from a ruptured disc. In the next issue, I’ll address bone spurs, which are a major problem in arthritic conditions, and an excellent nutritional protocol to support their disappearance!

Dr. Lynn Toohey received her Ph.D. in nutrition from Colorado State University in Ft. Collins, CO. She has lectured to chiropractors and other health professionals across the country and, also, in Canada and Europe on nutrition-related topics and complementary medicine. Various lecture engagements have included speaking for the International College of Applied Kinesiology (ICAK), the United Chiropractors of New Mexico (UCNM), and the Florida Chiropractic Association (FCA).

You may contact Dr. Toohey by e-mail at dttoohey@nutri-west.net.

References