

# Inflammation & Immune Balance

A SIMPLE BLOOD TEST can save your life. It is called C-reactive protein and it measures the degree of *hidden* inflammation in your body. This is important because almost every modern disease is caused by or affected by hidden inflammation, including heart disease, cancer, obesity, and dementia as well as arthritis, autoimmune disease, allergies, and digestive disorders.

If your immune system and your ability to balance the inflammatory forces in your body are impaired, watch out. You are headed toward illness and premature aging. But addressing the causes of inflammation and learning how to live an anti-inflammatory lifestyle can lead you to Optimal Wellness.

In the first lesson, I covered the effects of environmental inputs. Now in this section I will review the causes of inflammation and tell you how to cool it down. But first I want to help you understand more about it.

Everyone who has had a sore throat, a rash, hives, or a sprained ankle knows about inflammation. Those are normal appropriate responses of our defense system to infection or trauma. We need inflammation to survive.

The trouble occurs when that defense system runs out of control, like a rebel army bent on destroying its own country. Most people are familiar with overactive immune responses and too much inflammation in common conditions like allergies, rheumatoid arthritis, autoimmune disease or asthma. But few people know that hidden inflammation run amok is at the root of all chronic illness: heart disease, obesity, diabetes, dementia, depression, cancer and even autism. The real concern is not our acute response to injury, infection or insult, but the chronic smoldering inflammation that slowly destroys our organs, our ability for optimal functioning and leads to rapid aging. We may feel healthy, but if this inflammation is raging inside of us, then we have a problem.

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Common treatments such as anti-inflammatory drugs (ibuprofen or aspirin), or steroids like prednisone, though often useful for acute problems, interfere with the body's own immune response and lead inevitably to serious and deadly side effects. As many people die from taking anti-inflammatory drugs like ibuprofen as die every year from asthma or leukemia. Stopping the use of these drugs would be the equivalent to finding a cure for both.

So what is the best way to control inflammation while we're still *upstream*? First, identify the triggers and causes of inflammation, and then help the body's natural immune balance reset by providing the right conditions for it to thrive.

### **What causes inflammation?**

If inflammation and immune imbalances are at the root of most of modern disease, how do we find the causes and get the body back in balance?

Thankfully the list of things that cause inflammation is relatively short:

- Poor diet: mostly sugar, refined flours, processed food and inflammatory fats such as trans and saturated fats
- Lack of exercise
- Stress
- Hidden or chronic infections with viruses, bacteria, yeasts or parasites
- Hidden allergens from food or the environment
- Toxins such as mercury and pesticides
- Mold toxins and allergens

My job is to find those inflammatory factors unique to each person, to see how various lifestyle, environment or infectious factors spin the immune system out of control leading to a host of chronic illnesses. Carefully listening to a person's story and a few specific tests help me find the cause in most people.

It is important to understand that this concept of inflammation is not specific to any one organ or medical specialty. In fact, if you read a medical journal from any of the specialties you will find endless articles about how inflammation is at the root of problem.

The issue is the lack of communication between specialties. Everyone is treating the *downstream* effects of inflammation, instead of addressing the cause: multiple problems that are really linked together by inflammation. Take for example, a man who came to see me because he wanted to climb a mountain and asked for my help to get healthy. He was 57-years old and on about 15 medications for about five different inflammatory conditions including high blood pressure, pre-diabetes, colitis, reflux, asthma, and an autoimmune disease of his hair follicles called alopecia.

I asked him how he felt and he said great. I said, I am surprised because I see you are on so many medications. Yes, he said, but everything was very well controlled with the latest medication given by the top specialists he saw in every field: the lung doctor for his asthma, the gastroenterologist for his colitis and reflux, the cardiologist for his high blood pressure, the endocrinologist for his pre-diabetes, the dermatologist for his hair loss.

I asked him with all these top specialists he saw, did anyone ask him why he had five different inflammatory diseases and why his immune system was so pissed off. Was it just bad luck that he "got" all these diseases or was there something connecting all these problems? He looked puzzled and said no.

I then searched for and found the cause of his problems: gluten. He had celiac

disease, an autoimmune disease related to eating gluten, the protein found in wheat, barley, rye, spelt and oats.

Six months later he came back twenty-five pounds lighter. He had regular blood pressure, no asthma, no reflux no more colitis. He said he was having normal bowel movements for the first time in his life. And even his hair was growing back. He was off nearly all his medications.

### **7 ways to avoiding inflammation**

Once you figure out the cause and get rid of it, how do you live an anti-inflammatory lifestyle? Here is what I recommend. It's disarmingly simple, but an extraordinarily effective way to achieve Optimal Wellness:

- Eat a whole foods, high fiber, plant based diet which is inherently anti-inflammatory. That means unprocessed, unrefined, real food and high in powerful anti-inflammatory plant chemicals called phytonutrients. Nothing full of sugar or trans fats.
- Get an oil change. Eat healthy fats from olive oil, nuts, avocados and omega 3 fats from small fish like sardines, herring, sable, and wild salmon.
- Exercise. Find activities you enjoy.
- Learn to actively relax to engage your vagus nerve, the powerful nerve that relaxes your whole body and lowers inflammation, by doing yoga, meditation, deep breathing or even taking a hot bath.
- If you have food allergies, find out what they are and get stop eating them.
- Take probiotics ("good bacteria") daily to help your digestion to improve the healthy bacteria in your gut, which reduces inflammation. (BIG doses are better look for Billions not millions of bugs per pill. Products with a mix of bug are generally better).
- Take a multi-vitamin and mineral supplement which helps reduce inflammation.

Taking a comprehensive approach to inflammation and balancing your immune system will help address one of the most important systems of the body.

In the future we may no longer have specialties like cardiology or neurology or gastroenterology, but new specialists like "inflammalogists". But by understanding these concepts and core systems as the basis of Functional Medicine, you don't have to wait.