

Getting A Handle On Pain And Inflammation

The most common symptoms that bring a patient to the doctor's office is pain that does not go away adequately, which is called chronic pain. Back pain, neck pain and headaches are some of the most common types of chronic pain.

Anyone with chronic pain has typically tried non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) like aspirin or ibuprofen (Advil), or anti-pain medications like acetaminophen (Tylenol). Each medication is associated with side-effects, such as liver toxicity for acetaminophen and ulcers for NSAIDs. Interestingly, the second most common cause of ulcers is the regular use of aspirin and other NSAIDs.

In an effort to avoid the side effects associated with NSAIDs, many individuals seek out nutritional supplements that can be used as an alternative. There is a secret that must be understood before one searches out nutritional supplements to reduce pain and inflammation. Our diets substantially determine the inflammation levels in the body, which can directly impact upon the development of pain.

The foods that cause inflammation and lead to pain include refined sugar, refined grains and related flour products (bread, pasta, bagels, etc.), refined oils, and obese meat. These inflammatory foods make up approximately 80% of the average American's calorie intake¹, and yet even 30-40% of calories from these foods is too much. Eating a diet comprised of the inflammatory foods creates a tsunami of inflammation within the body that will hit joint and muscle sooner or later causing pain and suffering. At this point, people start taking NSAIDs and Tylenol, and all the while continue to eat the same inflammatory foods that caused the problem.

In short, most people cannot turn off diet-driven inflammation and pain by taking medications or nutritional supplements. So it is important to make dietary changes to calm the inflammatory state. To expect that drugs and supplements will be curative is not reasonable.

Consider the term "nutritional supplement" it is supposed to supplement a healthy anti-inflammatory diet rather than one that is filled with the various inflammatory foods. The anti-inflammatory diet consists mostly of vegetables, fruit, raw nuts and potatoes in moderate amounts, and healthy proteins (lean meat, skinless chicken, fresh fish, omega-3 eggs or egg whites)¹⁻³. A little bit of dark chocolate, red wine, and stout beer are also anti-inflammatory. The best oils/fats include olive oil, coconut oil, and butter; and these should be used in moderation. A very popular oil supplement is fish oil that contains omega-3 fatty acids, which is famous for its anti-inflammatory properties.

Not well appreciated in America is that spicing our meals adds a substantial anti-inflammatory boost. Ginger, turmeric, rosemary, oregano, garlic, coriander, and nearly all spices tested thus far have proven to be anti-inflammatory⁴.

Because NSAIDs cause ulcers and other dangerous side effects, researchers began to look for alternative substances that can reduce pain and inflammation in a safer fashion. It was discovered that, when supplementing with ginger, certain individuals can substantially reduce chronic muscle and joint pain⁵. For more acute pain, such as flare ups of back pain, research has shown that white willow bark can reduce pain as effectively as Celebrex over a 4-week period⁶. Such studies led the American Pain Society and the American College of Physicians to view supplemental white willow bark as a recommended option for treating low back pain⁶.

There are also natural options for more acute injuries such as muscle strains and sprained joints. A unique enzyme called bromelain is found in pineapple and is known to have protein-digesting actions. It turns out that the inflammatory response associated with acute injuries involves the production of special proteins that are degraded by bromelain. Studies with bromelain and other enzymes demonstrate a reduction in recovery time after injury. In one study with ankle sprains, there was a 50% faster return to work and a 30% faster return to exercise⁷.

In summary, if you desire dietary approaches towards a pain-free state, natural options are available. Basic dietary changes and certain key supplements can be very helpful.

References:

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