

Script – Print – Finding the Source of Inflammation

Poor Diet, Inactivity and Chronic Disease All Key Contributors

Inflammation isn't always something you can detect, but over time it is something that can cause considerable harm to your body if you don't take action.

According to Kathleen Meade, family nurse practitioner for OSF HealthCare, inflammation is the body's defense mechanism against a harmful agent or an intruder into the body that's not supposed to be there. It can be caused by trauma, or chronic diseases like diabetes and arthritis. Poor diet and inactivity are also key contributors to inflammation.

“At some point everyone will have inflammation, whether it's acute, like a thorn in your finger that stimulates the inflammation process, or whether you have chronic inflammation, which is caused by a variety of agents whether it's viral, bacterial or auto immune diseases,” says Meade.

Acute inflammation causes noticeable symptoms, such as pain, redness or swelling. Chronic inflammation symptoms aren't so obvious, such as fatigue or fever. These symptoms can range from mild to severe and can last days to several months or longer.

“Anyone is prone to getting inflammation,” says Meade. “It's whether or not we can stop the cause of the inflammation or it's something more with autoimmune diseases or chronic disease, then we have to treat the underlying disease in order to slow down the inflammatory process.”

“Treatment is dependent on the underlying cause,” Meade adds. “We have several different tests we can perform and several different drugs we can utilize to minimize the inflammation, which in turn, can cause some chronic damage to our bodies.”

Inflammation can be controlled or possibly reversed through lifestyle changes. Managing stress, losing weight and incorporating regular exercise are other good ways to prevent inflammation, Meade says. Eliminating smoking and drinking also makes a difference.

“One of the biggest steps you can take to avoid inflammation is maintaining a healthy weight and a healthy lifestyle – getting up and getting active,” says Meade. “That also includes following a Mediterranean diet. They have found that olive oil, nuts, fish with omega three also help to provide an anti-inflammatory affect.”

Other anti-inflammatory foods include grapes, celery, blueberries, garlic, olive oil, and tea. Stay away from inflammatory foods such as red meat and anything with trans fats, such as margarine, deep fried foods and most processed foods. Limit or avoid carbohydrates, such as white flour, white rice, and refined sugar.

Meade adds that patients with a family history of health problems, such as heart disease or colon cancer, should talk to their physicians about what lifestyle changes will make the biggest impact on reducing inflammation.