

# **Inflammation: The Whys, Wherefores, & Strategies to Combat It**

By

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Of all the health challenges facing Americans today, perhaps the most pervasive and bothersome is inflammation of the body's tissues. As we all know, there is now a multibillion dollar market for the pharmaceutical industry's drugs dedicated solely to combating inflammation. Television, newspapers and magazines are inundated with advertising touting the benefits of these drugs. But how effective and safe are they? Are there other, more helpful strategies available that still do the job, but at lower risk? Such a discussion requires that we look at the process of inflammation itself, as well as the pros and cons of the various strategies.

First, it should be understood that inflammation is a normal process of the human body. Any stress to the body, whether from food or exercise, mental or emotional stress, toxic exposure or disease, results in some degree of inflammation in one or more organ systems. Inflammation becomes a problem when the process spirals out of control, producing ongoing discomfort and setting the stage for more serious conditions.

Inflammation starts when a particular organ system or component is subjected to some sort of stressor, resulting in either major or minor tissue damage. The body senses the damage and, in response, creates a device called a circulating immune complex which migrates to the injury site and begins the chemical process that results in the inflammatory reaction. Once this reaction begins, it becomes self-perpetuating until either the body itself or some outside agent intervenes to stop it. Since the body's natural processes work too slowly for most people, they usually seek out some means to stop the process, and the resulting discomfort, sooner rather than later.

The most popular means of combating inflammation are through use of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, or NSAIDs. These drugs either stop the inflammatory reaction from occurring or alleviate the symptoms. If this was all they did, modern medicine could justifiably declare victory over inflammation and rake in the billions of dollars of profits they would indefinitely enjoy.

Unfortunately, because these drugs are synthetic, their chemical compounds do not accurately align with the appropriate cell receptor sites like natural compounds do. The results are the infamous side effects that accompany long term NSAID use. Among the documented effects of habitual NSAID use are liver and kidney damage, acceleration of the progression of osteoarthritis, and internal bleeding. In fact, our nation loses tens of thousands of its citizens annually to the effects of NSAIDs. However, many people continue to use NSAIDs because they believe they have no other alternative. Nothing could be further from the truth.

One alternative is to use the herbal precursors to synthetic drugs. While they work somewhat more slowly than drugs, these all natural herbs do not generate the side effects accompanying NSAIDs. One example of such an effective herb is white willow bark. The natural precursor to common aspirin, white willow bark is high in salicylic acid, the

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active ingredient in aspirin. But it also contains all the natural protective cofactors that synthetic aspirin does not, allowing it to be used without fear of aspirin's side effects.

A second approach is to use nutritionals. This approach works particularly well when dealing with the joint pain accompanying osteoarthritis. The nutritional approach works by replacing the building block material lost through joint erosion and aging. When our bodies are younger, their recuperative powers are able to replace the cartilage building material (primarily glucosamine) that is lost through continued use. Starting around age 40, however, the body stops manufacturing this material. Unless a person uses supplements to replace them, joint erosion and the accompanying pain will continue unabated, causing progressively greater loss of mobility. Research has shown that while such supplementation is initially less effective than NSAIDs, the effectiveness of supplements increases over time and actually surpasses NSAIDs with continued use. To ensure the effectiveness of these nutritionals, one must avoid certain foods (primarily caffeine and the nightshade vegetables) which counteract the effectiveness of the supplements.

A third exciting alternative, one which has gained popularity and credibility because of both its demonstrated effectiveness and the large amount of accompanying, validated research, is the use of systemic enzymes to help combat inflammation. Systemic enzymes can be helpful for a variety of health challenges, but are particularly helpful in dealing with inflammation. These enzymes are designed to bypass the normal digestive processes and are absorbed directly through the digestive tract into the bloodstream. Once there, they migrate to the site of inflammation and work by actually consuming the protein complexes that are the cause of inflammation. The only limitation to their effectiveness is that they must be taken between meals. Also, they are not indicated for people who are on blood thinners, because they act to enhance the effectiveness of those drugs and can result in over thinning of the blood. Enzyme therapy is especially useful for aiding in recuperation from athletic injuries. It can also be used in conjunction with the other methods listed above to address a health challenge more comprehensively.

Inflammation negatively impacts the quality of life of millions of people. Through intelligent use of natural remedies, inflammation can be safely and effectively addressed. Contact us for more information about your health concerns in this area.

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