Inflammation is our body’s greatest foe

Written by PHILIP S. CHUA, M.D., FACS, FPCS
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WHILE the initial stage of our body’s protective auto-repair mechanism when we acquire any type of acute infection (bacterial, viral, fungal, protozoan, etc.) involves inflammation, which significantly helps in the healing process, “silent” chronic inflammation all of us have in our body, day in and day out, which is not obvious to us, is actually the cause of most, if not all, illnesses we are encounter in our life, from minor cold, hay fever, high blood pressure, diabetes, heart diseases, stroke, Alzheimer’s, and even cancer.

The inflammation resulting from common acute infections we get is not the inflammation I am referring to, although inflammation from repeated bouts of acute infection (like tooth decay or gingivitis, or wound infection, for example) could also lead to increased risk of the inflammatory process that could lead to major diseases listed above.

This association has been proven in a multitude of scientific studies.

What is inflammation?

The origin of the word inflammation is from the Latin word “inflammo,” which means “I set alight, I ignite.”
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A part of our natural biological defense and immune system response, inflammation has the following features:

It is the body’s attempt to protect itself by counteracting or removing harmful stimuli, irritants, or invading foreign organism, and start the healing process.

Inflammation ensues when the body is confronted by an irritant (trauma, infection, poison, radiation, etc.).

In acute infection, our white blood cells instantly go into action and automatically produce protective substances that protect us from the infection or invading foreign organisms (bacteria, viruses, etc.).

Infection causes swelling, redness and pain.

In the latter part of the inflammatory process, there could be suppuration (pus formation) in the wound, then granulation (tiny rounded masses of tissues in the wound as a part of containing the irritant and the healing process).

While acute inflammation lasts about a few days or a couple of weeks, chronic inflammation could last for months or even years.

Without inflammation, infections and wounds would become worse and damage the body more, and no repair or healing would be possible, and we would eventually perish.

How about chronic inflammation?

Chronic (long-term) inflammation in the body, like dental carries, eczema, infection of the ear,

[To be continued...]

Learn more here: [Inflammation - Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inflammation)
nose, sinuses, nail, skin, stomach, colon or any tissue or organ inside our body, could lead to major killer diseases of our time, including cancer.

It is, therefore, prudent for all of us to avoid and prevent any condition that would lead to chronic inflammation.

While inflammation is present in all infections, inflammation does not always mean, or associated with, infection (like in arthritis).

We shall discuss the preventive pro-active strategy below.

**Is arthritis an inflammation?**

Yes, arthritis is the inflammation of the joints. In general, any entity that ends in “itis” is an inflammatory condition, like, sinusitis (sinus infection), otitis (ear infection), myocarditis (inflammation of the heart muscles), pneumonitis (inflammation of the lungs, pneumonia) gastritis (inflammation of the stomach), appendicitis (inflammation of the appendix), colitis (inflammation of the colon), nephritis (inflammation of the kidneys), etc.

While there are no bacteria or viruses involved in arthritis, the body’s immune system triggers an inflammatory response, in spite of the absence of foreign invaders, hence arthritis is called an auto-immune disease, where the body’s normally protective immune system causes damage to its own tissues, mistaking them as harmful foreign invaders.

Inflammation can target internal organs as a part of an auto-immune disorder.

**How does inflammation linger in our body?**
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There are many human conditions, activities and behaviors in our lifestyle that promote chronic unending inflammation in our body, which eventually cause major illnesses, like high blood pressure, diabetes, thyroid and heart diseases, stroke, Alzheimer’s and cancer.

Among others, they include poor nutrition, unhealthy diet, smoking, alcohol excess, lack of physical exercise and stress management, polluted air and water, excessive dose of sunlight, exposure to radiation and toxic chemicals.

Repeated exposures to any of the above harmful triggers will incite, initiate and propagate inflammation in our cells, tissues, organs and systems, damaging the integrity of our DNA.

Persistent inflammation in the body will eventually cause major diseases.

As we have alluded to earlier, chronic inflammation increases the risk for the development of most cancers.

How do we prevent inflammation?

Since irritants that trigger inflammation could be found even in the womb or in the crib, babies, toddlers and young children could have some degree of inflammation in their system, even before they catch a cold or have diarrhea, milk or diet intolerance or trauma.

So, realistically, we cannot totally prevent the onset of inflammation.

But we can certainly reduce or minimize chronic inflammation and maintain a healthier body, and enjoy a longer life.

A healthy diet is Number One, an essential factor in reducing chronic inflammation, especially
one mainly of fish (source of healthy omega 3 fatty acids) vegetables, nuts, some fruits, limiting red meat to about three times a week, regular physical exercises, and rest and relaxation as part of stress management.

The first five food items, especially vegetables of all kinds and color, are potent antioxidants and anti-inflammatory foods that help the body rid itself of harmful free radicals, boosting the immune system and thereby reducing inflammation.

Regular daily physical exercise is a great anti-inflammatory activity, which in itself is an anti-oxidant, reducing our risk for.

High blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, Alzheimer and cancer!

Quitting cigarettes or the more toxic e-cigarettes, moderation in alcohol intake, lessening our exposure to the sun and pollution also spare damages to our DNA, lessening inflammation and the development of illnesses, including cancer.

Like vegetables, garlic, pepper, ginger, onion, tumeric, curry, rosemary, thyme, chive and other spices also have beneficial antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties good for health.

Indeed, they are the spice of health, of life!

Our body is like an auto-regulated chemistry laboratory and pharmacy and has super-acute sensors that respond instantly to stimuli (either good or bad), to irritants and insults, and to bodily needs — all to maintain a homeostatic balance and health.

Unhealthy behaviors and practices induce inflammation and the production of harmful hormones in our body.
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A healthy lifestyle promotes the secretion of good, happy hormones that minimize inflammation, reduce our risk for illnesses, and maximize our natural longevity.

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