

WTNS Radio OSU Extension Update for June 22, 2020
Healthy People. Healthy Finances. Healthy Relationships.

On today's OSU Extension update for Healthy People, Healthy Finances, and Healthy Relationships we'll talk about having an anti-inflammatory lifestyle.

Before I came to Extension, I worked for a nutrition company. One of the many hot topics of discussion at the time was how to prevent and alleviate inflammation. I have to admit that when I first heard about inflammation, my only associated thought was arthritis. I had no idea at the time that inflammation is a natural way that our bodies fight off infection, increase blood flow to places that need healing, and generate pain as a signal that something is wrong. The issue is when these natural reactions happen at too high a frequency or duration.

There is much research on inflammation effects of pharmaceuticals, nutraceuticals, as well as the foods we eat. I recently watched a very informative webinar from some colleagues at University of Florida Extension. Dr. Wendy Dahl is a Nutrition Specialist and shared an overview of recent studies that have been researching the connection between diet and inflammation. Her overall message was clear, like we often say with nutrition, there is no silver bullet. The healthy choices we make every day either add to or subtract from our health. With the bombardment of information from the media, it can be tricky to pull out what is reliable and what is sensational. So here is some guidance from Dr. Dahl.

Remember that the ability for our body to cause inflammation can be a very good thing to heal our bodies. But when it more or less goes into overdrive, then the result is stress on our body's systems that can result in anything from heart disease to asthma, Crohn's disease to cancer, and many others. When many of these studies are done, the researchers are looking for specific markers in our blood that indicate how much inflammation there is. Some of these markers include C-Reactive Protein (CRP) and Tumor Necrosis Factor alpha (TNF alpha).

One of the greatest food effects on inflammation is the kind and amount of carbohydrates that we eat. Foods that are high in refined carbohydrates have a high glycemic index. These are foods like white flour and refined sugar that are easily broken down and cause spikes in our production of insulin. Likewise, eating many carbohydrates at a time rather than balancing with protein and fat is called eating a high glycemic load. In both cases, production of the CRP indicator protein increases.

Eating fruits and vegetables leads to both a reduction in CRP and TNF alpha levels. Studies show that olive oil might exert beneficial effects on markers of inflammation and endothelial function or keeping our blood vessels pliable.

There are also studies that look at food synergy. Instead of focusing on just one type of food they look holistically at people's everyday diets. Overwhelmingly, plant-based diets are associated with overall improvement in inflammatory profiles compared with a typical American diet that includes a lot of processed foods and few vegetables. Now plant-based does not mean just vegetarian. A plant-based diet can include meat. It mainly means you are consuming the recommended intake of fruits and vegetables, making sure that you eat them at every meal.

There are multiple healthy plant-based diets that we can use including vegetarian, the DASH diet (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) and Mediterranean Diet. Overall, these plant-based diet patterns are associated with improvement in inflammatory profiles compared with typical "unhealthy" American diets.

The University of Wisconsin also has some good advice on lifestyle choices in addition to food that will aid in an anti-inflammatory lifestyle.

1. Be Active - Exercise has been shown to reduce inflammation and people who get regular physical activity have lower levels of inflammation. Each week aim for 150 minutes of moderate intensity aerobic physical activity such as brisk walking. And don't forget about muscle-strengthening activities 2 or more days per week.
2. Get Enough Quality Sleep – Adults should aim for 7-9 hours of restful sleep per night.
3. Manage Stress - Stress is a natural part of life and can change over the course of life. All of the strategies already mentioned — eating a healthy diet, being active, and getting enough sleep — help support the body's ability to manage life's stresses.
4. Manage Weight - Some research suggests that maintaining a healthy weight may be important for keeping inflammation under control. Even modest weight loss of 10% of body weight can help to reduce inflammation.

In closing, at OSU Extension, we are proud to work for Coshocton County to help improve our families, farms, and businesses. Please feel free to contact OSU Extension for more information at 740-622-2265 or visit our website at coshocton.osu.edu. Make it a healthy day!