Inflammation Part 2: Treat the Cause

In the last article, I wrote about how inflammation affects your health and how to treat it naturally, with food and supplements. Today’s column addresses the causes of inflammation and treating the root of the problem.

What are the signs? If your face often looks puffy, if you can't get your rings off or if you have chronic pain, you may have more systemic inflammation. If your inflammation is severe, there are two blood tests to consider: the Erythrocytes sedimentation rate (ESR) and C-reactive protein (CRP).

Among my patients, the root of the problem is usually in the digestive tract. The basics of digestion are:

1) Chewed food is broken down into smaller particles and mixed with enzymes. (Mom was right when she said to chew 40 times).

2) The chewed food, called the “bolus”, moves to the stomach where it combines with acid, pepsin and intrinsic factor to digest protein, B vitamins and minerals.

3) As the food moves out into the small intestines the gallbladder (with the help of the liver) squirts bile into the small intestines this aids in the digestion of fats.

4) Next, the pancreas adds enzymes to digest fats, carbohydrates and proteins. This is where digestion occurs and then the food gets absorbed in the small intestines.

5) The large intestine is where fluid balance is achieved and is either absorbed or eliminated.

(Include picture of GI tract)

Inflammation occurs when the digestive system does not break down food completely. As a result, the small intestines become hyper-permeable and large food particles and/or bacteria and viruses enter the blood stream. The normal response of the body is to see this as an invasion. The body’s reaction is inflammation.

There are tests available to determine if compromised digestion and permeability are happening to you. Certain labs offer a functional stool analysis that helps determine stomach acid, biliary function, pancreatic enzyme function and absorption. Working on your digestive tract should be something we think of as regular maintenance - like changing the oil in our car.

One method of working on the gut is by working on your diet.

* Minimize saturated fats and increase omega 3 oils found in fish and grass fed meat.
* Avoid processed foods like soda, candy, chips and canned foods with large amounts of salt.
* Eat fruits and vegetables with color. The more color, the antioxidants. Make a goal to have half of your plate be vegetables.
* Cook with olive oil and eat raw nuts. The healthiest diet is in the Mediterranean with a large amount of monounsaturated fats compared to saturated fats.
* Use anti-inflammatory seasonings like ginger, garlic, onions, turmeric.
* Eat fiber, it lowers CRP.
* Drink in moderation.

My go-to healthy meals are:

1) Sole steamed with ginger and scallions, brown rice and bok choi.

2) Shrimp with old bay seasoning, broccoli with truffle oil and sea salt and a baked sweet potato.

Both will digest easily and help reduce inflammation

Bon Appetit!