Put Out the Fire To Put the Fire Back Into Your Game

By Dr. Ramona Warren

Spring is here and many people are heading to the golf course or tennis court after a long, gloomy winter. Unfortunately, too many times, the joy of the game is short-lived due to pain in the back, elbow, shoulder, knee or some other part of the body. One of the primary causes of this pain is inflammation.

Inflammation is a natural response by the body to protect itself from something that is harmful. Bacteria, viruses, parasites, a fungus, allergens, damaged cells or something foreign to the body like a splinter can all cause inflammation and infection. Injuries to the body can cause inflammation, as well.

Inflammation is like a “fire” within the body. When the body is functioning properly there are anti-inflammatory compounds that “put out the fire” after the foreign “invader” has been dealt with. These substances act to reduce the inflammation and restore the body to a balanced state.

Problems develop when inflammation becomes chronic. When this happens, tissue is continually broken down and repaired, which leads to scarring and destruction of the tissue. For example, chronic inflammation in the blood vessels leads to atherosclerosis; in the joints it leads to bursitis or arthritis; in the pancreas it can lead to diabetes or pancreatitis. Other symptoms that are associated with chronic inflammation include:

* stiffness
* muscle aches and pains
* tendonitis
* fibromyalgia
* rashes
* diarrhea
* congestion
* asthma
* brain fog
* migraines
* ADD/ADHD

Most people don’t associate the above symptoms with a fire raging within. In fact, people are often unaware they have chronic inflammation in their body. They may come in to the office complaining of back pain, shoulder pain, neck pain or some other joint pain. Oftentimes, the pain is related to a long-standing inflammatory process that manifests once they put stress on that particular area of the body, such as swinging a golf club or tennis racket. As a result, this type of pain continually returns and can be frustrating for both doctor and patient. Inflammation can cause damage and destruction for many years before symptoms become evident. Many studies are showing chronic inflammation is one of the main culprits for accelerated aging, dubbing the process “inflammaging.”

Medications might treat inflammatory symptoms and make us “feel” better on the surface, but they don’t get to the source of the problem. It is very common for patients to say they take anti-inflammatory medications, such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen, before and/or after they play golf or tennis to help prevent and manage their pain. These individuals are unaware of the damage that can be caused by masking the pain with a drug rather than finding out why they have the pain in the first place. Having to use medications to help with pain is a strong sign there is a fire raging inside.

Getting to the root cause is key to resolving chronic pain and inflammation. Most inflammation is caused by lifestyle choices. Sleep issues, smoking, poor quality diet and obesity are the main risk factors. Each of these can create stress in the body that causes an inflammatory response and turns on the “fire.” The fire doesn’t go out until we make the necessary changes to our lifestyle. Here are some simple steps you can take to begin putting out the fire:

1. **Start by improving your diet.** Eat quality organic foods, including green leafy vegetables, lean meats (grass-fed and free-range is best), wild caught cold water fish, nuts and seeds. Avoid the foods that lead to inflammation such as sugar, artificial sweeteners, gluten, corn, soy and cow milk products.
2. **Increase your activity.** Being sedentary puts you at high risk for inflammation. Walking at moderate intensity for 30 minutes, 5 days a week and doing strength training two days a week has been shown to reduce the risk of chronic inflammation.
3. **Take supplements.** Certain supplements are known to help reduce inflammation. A few of these include Vitamin D, quality fish oil from cold water sources, magnesium, zinc, black currant seed oil and Boswellia.
4. **Get a good night’s sleep.** Studies show that over half of Americans don’t get enough sleep. This leads to the release of pro-inflammatory substances. Sleep is essential to health.
5. **Reduce environmental toxins.** These toxins are the “foreign invaders” that cause the inflammatory response in the body. Many toxins are found in the foods people eat and drink.
6. **Manage your stress.** Stress is “the silent killer” because it leads to inflammatory responses in the body and can slowly damage many systems, especially the digestive system.

When you go out on the golf course or tennis courts this spring, take control and put out the “fire” within the body so you can get back in the game….pain free.

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