

# Inflammation in Your Body and Your Health

By *Ivonne Draughon, DNP, NP-C*

If you've spent time following popular health sites or celebrity doctors, you've probably seen or heard the buzzword "inflammation" being thrown around. You may even have encountered miracle cures like the "anti-inflammatory diet" out there. Typically, most people associate inflammation with physical symptoms like swelling, redness, and bruising. In truth, this condition can be much more serious. Uncontrolled chronic inflammation plays a significant role in almost every major disease, including cancer, heart disease, diabetes, dementia, even depression.

## THE NUTS AND BOLTS OF INFLAMMATION

Inflammation is your body's first line of defense against injury, infections, and toxins. When your cells experience distress, they alert the immune system, which sends its first responders—inflammatory cells—to trap the offending substance or heal the wounded tissue. Blood vessels leak fluid at the site of the injury, causing the telltale swelling, redness, and pain. This is essential to the body's healing processes.

## HOW CAN A GOOD THING BE BAD?

Here's the problem with inflammation: over time, you can end up with too much of a good thing. This issue is called chronic inflammation, which is what happens when your body is constantly on high alert. This condition can cause long-term damage to your heart, brain, and other organs.

## WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU HAVE CHRONIC INFLAMMATION?

Inflammation is a significant underlying cause of myriad long-term health issues. Over the last decade, an abundance of evidence has revealed chronic inflammation's link to obesity and insulin resistance, which marks the early stages leading to diabetes.

To explain this association more fully: in obesity and related metabolic conditions,



which now occur at epidemic proportions throughout the world, lipids accumulate in the form of white adipose tissue, or fat in the abdomen. Lipid accumulation causes our immune systems to secrete cytokines and deposit leukocytes in fat tissue. This buildup creates a chronic inflammatory state, which connects obesity with cardiovascular disease, type-2 diabetes, and cancer.

Furthermore, medical research has also clarified the close relationships between inflammation, diabetes, and heart disease. This work shows that disturbances in blood glucose levels—the hallmark of diabetes—are associated with a chronic inflammatory response. In turn, these issues can cause metabolic syndromes that increase the risk of heart disease and stroke.

Inflammation, along with physical and emotional trauma, can also stem from stress reactions. Stress affects many aspects of our physiology and can increase our susceptibility to disease. Acute forms of stress can induce inflammation or otherwise accelerate the course of infectious, autoimmune, allergic, or neoplastic diseases, such as cancer.

## WHAT CAN WE DO TO AVOID CHRONIC INFLAMMATION?

Fortunately, avoiding chronic inflammation is simpler than we might think. Seeking treatment early and making simple yet important lifestyle changes, from getting more sleep to taking up a hobby, can all help. These actions can help boost your mood and prevent chronic inflammation:

- Get enough sleep
- Exercise
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Regulate your blood sugar through a healthy diet
- Avoid sodas and fast food
- Eat healthy fats
- Find passion in life
- Take steps to control stress to increase your resilience and boost your self-esteem
- Reach out to family and friends
- Focus on things you can do, not on things you can't
- Use positive words with yourself and the people around you
- See your provider on a regular basis. He or she can assist you in staying healthy.
- Get preventive screenings and seek treatment at the earliest sign of a problem.

hkh

*Ivonne Draughon, DNP, NP-C, is a Certified Nurse Practitioner, currently treats all ages at the Carolina Partners Wake Forest office and specializes in psychiatric medication management and general primary care services. It is her dream to help patients through a multi-dimensional approach to health care. She believes patients often have more than one need, and she finds providers can do their jobs better by being able to see the whole picture. This approach requires that doctors take their patients' physical as well as mental well-being into account. For more information or to schedule an initial evaluation call (919) 929-9610, or visit our website ([www.carolinapartners.com](http://www.carolinapartners.com)) to complete an online intake form.*