

[IMAGE]

Staying Healthy During Tough Economic Times

By David Seaman, MS, DC, DACBN

Many of us are feeling the economic crunch these days. Money is tight and the bills continue to arrive in our mailboxes. Stressful times such as these demand resiliency on our part, particularly in terms of our exercise and diet habits. Interestingly, a mentally stressed state can promote inflammation throughout the body.

Avoiding mental stressors is not likely to be easy during these times, so we must consider the importance of avoiding inflammation caused by other factors, such as poor diet and lack of exercise.

When you hear the word *inflammation*, you probably think first about swelling, redness, pain, etc., that can occur following an acute injury, irritation or infection. In general, this is short-term, localized inflammation (confined to a certain area of the body). But inflammation can also occur without physical injury. This is general, body-wide (systemic) inflammation, and it can cause subtle biochemical injuries to body tissues, increasing the risk of developing a number of serious diseases over time.

- Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark We promote the development of systemic inflammation by avoiding exercise and remaining sedentary. Not surprisingly, we should exercise daily to help prevent inflammation, and we must also modify our dietary habits. Believe it or not, diet is actually the most important factor affecting inflammation. Scientific research suggests that most diseases are caused by chronic, diet-induced inflammation. The average American diet is high in calories and low in fiber and nutrients. Approximately 80 percent of the calories consumed by Americans are derived from refined flour products, refined sugar, refined seed oils (concentrated source of omega-6 and trans fats) and fatty meat. It is now common knowledge that eating excess calories from sugar and fat leads to postprandial (following a meal) inflammation, which is thought to function as an insidious promoter of heart disease, diabetes, osteoporosis, osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, Alzheimer's disease, obesity, hypertension, asthma, depression, inflammatory bowel disease, psoriasis and cancer. That's a long list of serious health conditions, all linked to a single culprit: inflammation.

Good Nutrition Is Inexpensive

Lean meat, fish, chicken, fruits, vegetables and nuts form the foundation of a diet that limits a postprandial inflammatory response. This is referred to as an "anti-inflammatory diet." Not surprisingly, this diet is recommended to help prevent the above-mentioned pro-inflammatory diseases, the treatment of which represents a massive drain on financial resources, both personally and for businesses.

A common argument is, "I can't afford to eat lots of fruits and vegetables," or "Healthy foods are expensive." I tend to strongly disagree with these arguments. A cup of coffee and a doughnut can cost up to \$5. A 20 oz. bottle of soda costs more than \$1. In contrast, a 5-pound bag of frozen carrots, broccoli and cauliflower costs \$5 at Sam's Club, and a 1-pound container of pre-washed organic salad greens costs about \$4. Both of those items can be consumed over several days by several people.

A large sweet potato that can be split between two meals costs about 75 cents. While certain nuts are very expensive (macadamias, for example), many are very reasonable. Lean meats, fish and chicken are reasonably priced and can be added to the vegetables and sweet potatoes. Fresh fruit remains very reasonable and should be one of the snacks of choice.

Dark chocolate is inexpensive and can be mixed with raw nuts and raisins for a great snack or dessert. I often melt a 50-calorie piece of dark chocolate with a little coconut oil and add some nuts and raisins. I place this combination on a piece of wax/freezer paper and place it into the freezer for about 10 minutes. My reward is an anti-inflammatory candy bar.

It is *not* more expensive to eat healthy, anti-inflammatory foods, if one shops wisely. Certainly, preventing the expression of chronic disease will save countless dollars and heartaches associated with the accelerated morbidity and mortality associated with pro-inflammatory living. In short, we cannot afford to eat any other way *but* anti-inflammatory.

Inexpensive Supplements for Health Promotion

image - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark There are also key supplements that support the reduction of inflammation and free-radical generation, and they're also reasonably priced. (Free radicals are unstable molecules that can damage surrounding molecules in the body. They have been linked to an increased risk of cancer, among other diseases.) The basic supplements include a multivitamin without iron, magnesium, fish oil and vitamin D. The total cost is approximately \$60 to \$80 per month, which is less than \$3 per day. If you can only afford one supplement, vitamin D seems like the best choice because research has

demonstrated that vitamin D insufficiency is pandemic. The next best financial choice for a supplement would be a multivitamin/mineral without iron. After that, fish oil should be added, and finally magnesium. If a fifth supplement can be afforded, probiotics are the best choice, as they have a strongly anti-inflammatory effect in the gut.

If money is not particularly an issue, additional supplements should be considered, including coenzyme Q10, lipoic acid, acetyl-L-carnitine, ginger, turmeric and garlic. These supplements help to promote ATP synthesis and reduce free radicals and inflammation.

The Bottom Line

While finances have been tight lately due to external economic forces, and may get worse in the near future, we can easily make this situation a lot worse by pursuing disease expression due to a pro-inflammatory lifestyle. Medical care for pro-inflammatory diseases is extremely expensive and generally preventable by adopting an anti-inflammatory diet that is no more expensive than one that is pro-inflammatory. Key supplements can be added based on financial ability.

We should consider that paying for expensive medical care will put most of us into debt even when economic times are good. So it makes no sense to pursue disease and expensive medical care with a pro-inflammatory lifestyle when economic times are not so good. In short, nutrition does not need to be compromised, even when the economy is down. Talk to your doctor for more information.

Foods That Promote Inflammation

- High-fat meats (especially red meat)
 - Processed meats
 - Sugary snacks, sodas and cereals
 - Refined grains
 - Candy and junk food
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Foods That Discourage Inflammation

- Salmon and other oily fish
 - Flax/pumpkin seeds
 - Olive oil
 - Whole grains
 - Brightly colored fruits and vegetables
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