

Herbal Anti-inflammatories

Kristine Brown - Traditional Community Herbalist

What is Inflammation and What Causes It?

The short answer is it is a localized physical condition in which part of the body becomes reddened, swollen, hot, and often painful, especially as a reaction to injury or infection. Inflammation can be acute or chronic and systemic.

Inflammation is good for our body and helps the body fight foreign invaders and also has a role in repairing damage.

Examples of acute inflammation include: allergic reaction, trauma (sprains, falls, etc), burns, cuts, chemical reactions, infections (pneumonia, appendicitis, gastric ulcers, etc), physical irritants (splinters, dirt, sutures) and frostbite.

Examples of chronic and systemic inflammation include: autoimmune diseases (rheumatoid arthritis, gout, chrohn's disease, multiple sclerosis, systemic lupus erythematosus), colitis, tuberculosis, tendonitis, pancreatitis, pulmonary silicosis, asthma, allergies, heart disease, obesity, depression, heart disease, cancer, Alzheimer's, metabolic syndrome and every other Western disease

Why Herbal Anti-inflammatories?

Typically Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) are used to treat inflammation. NSAIDs work by preventing prostaglandins from being produced, and prostaglandins create inflammation so blocking these prevents inflammation and therefore the pain associated with it. Herbal anti-inflammatories, on the other hand, do not suppress, they change the conditions in the tissues so that the healing process can be completed, allowing the tissues to return to a state of health.

- ~ Herbs are safe and effective
- ~ Herbs don't cause liver and kidney damage as NSAIDs can
- ~ NSAIDs can delay muscle regeneration and may reduce ligament, tendon, and cartilage healing which herbs do not
- ~ Herbs often give better pain relief than NSAIDs
- ~ Herbs support and encourage the natural healing process

Other Health Measures You Can Take to Reduce Inflammation

While herbs can be helpful for reducing inflammation, when focusing on chronic inflammation, it is important to look at your diet and lifestyle and make changes to assist in the healing process. Especially in chronic inflammation, herbs alone will not be enough to heal the body.

~Increase omega-3 fats (butter, coconut oil, lard, extra virgin olive oil, oily, cold-water fish, flaxseeds or oil, and walnuts, grassed meat and eggs, evening primrose seeds, borage seeds) and decrease omega-6 fats (corn, sunflower, soybean oils, vegetable shortening, margarine, all partially hydrogenated oils and all foods that contain trans-fatty acids) from your diet.

~Stop eating toxic foods. Sugar, high processed carbs, gluten, etc.

~Allow recovery time. If you have chronic inflammation, don't overdo your physical activity. Allow your body to rest and recover from injury.

~Get plenty of sleep. Your body cannot heal without adequate rest.

~Exercise. Take the steps instead of an elevator, daily walks, yoga, frisbee, etc.

~Take time to unwind. Make it a point to relax every day. Sitting in front of the computer does not count.

~Spend time outdoors. Learn to reconnect with the natural world. Walk barefoot. Stop and smell the flowers, then pick a bouquet for the house.

~Change how you look at stress. While it's important to reduce stress in your life, if not possible, consider how stress is our body's way of protecting us and look at it as a positive thing (watch the TED talk listed in references).

~Increase gut health. Remove allergen foods such as wheat, corn, etc. Take probiotics. Drink gut healing tea blends such as Calendula, Marshmallow leaf, Plantain, Ginger root and Peppermint.

Herbal Anti-inflammatories:

The following list is a short list of versatile anti-inflammatories. They can be taken internally, applied as compresses or poultices or in combination depending on the inflammation being treated.

Calendula (*Calendula officinalis*)

Ginger (*Zingiber officinale*)

Nettles (*Urtica dioica*)

Peppermint (*Mentha piperita*)

Plantain (*Plantago spp.*)

Rose (*Rosa spp.*)

St. John's Wort (*Hypericum spp.*)

Turmeric (*Curcuma longa*)

Willow bark (*Salix spp.*)

Witch Hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*)

Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*)

Recommended Herbal Books (*indicates available through library loan system):

~The Herbal Handbook: A User's Guide to Medical Herbalism by David Hoffmann

~The Book of Herbal Wisdom by Matthew Wood

~Herbal Medicine From the Heart of the Earth by Sharol Tilgner, ND

Online Resources

Mark's Daily Apple on Inflammation:

<http://www.marksdailyapple.com/what-is-inflammation/#axzz381yPnvyX>

TED talk by Kelly McGonigal: How to make stress your friend:

https://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend

jim mcdonald's article on back pain has an excerpt on inflammation:

<http://www.herbcraft.org/backpain.html>

US National Library of Medicine article on Natural Anti-inflammatory agents for pain relief:

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3011108/>