

Go gently into that good life

There are ways to reduce your inflammation risk.

The lifestyle choices we make that contribute to inflammation are varied and complex, says Dr Tracy Chandler. But the good news is this gives us plenty of scope for improvement.

With a background in biochemistry and 17 years as a GP, Timaru-based Chandler focuses on combining the best of conventional medicine with integrative health practices through her Dr Wellness clinics.

The pro-inflammatory behaviours she sees among her patients include the obvious ones, such as poor diet, inadequate sleep and chronic stress. But other things may not spring to mind immediately. Excessive exercising is one.

"I see gym bunnies who are doing way too much – three hours a day," she says. "That is causing problems such as increased inflammation."

She advocates including natural dietary anti-inflammatories, such as turmeric, cloves, ginger, garlic and green tea, and fermented foods.

Other pro-inflammatory factors Chandler identifies include exposure to mould toxins in older or leaky homes, allergies that haven't been identified, infections people may not be aware they have – the gum disease gingivitis is a common one – and contact with heavy metals and chemical toxins. Conversely, being too clean can create risk,



Getting plenty of plant foods and avoiding processed ones are part of the answer.

because this can inhibit the development of the immune system.

It is possible to fix things and make a significant difference to your health, says Chandler, "but generally, the longer it's been going on, the longer it will take and the more measures that will be necessary".

She advocates a low-stress diet. "It's a bit boring, but aim for the 80/20 rule, because every bit helps." That means cutting

out any allergens such as gluten or dairy, avoiding all processed foods and anything with additives – including "natural" ones – not drinking alcohol, reducing sugar and getting plenty of plant foods, lean protein and good fats. She also advocates including natural dietary anti-inflammatories, such as turmeric, cloves, ginger, rosemary, cinnamon, oregano, marjoram,

sage, thyme, garlic, matcha and green tea, and fermented foods, if you can tolerate them. "Although not all at once."

If you're going to take supplements, make sure they're of good quality; low-quality ones can actually cause more inflammation. Chandler's anti-inflammatory picks are refrigerated fish oil, probiotics, turmeric and vitamins C and D.

She also suggests eating mindfully and chewing food until it liquefies properly. "The average New Zealander chews a mouthful of food four to six times," she

says. "As I'm always telling my patients, your gut only has teeth at the top. The gut lining is like skin, and we're expecting it to digest massive particles of food."

Chandler's key tip is to be gentle with yourself. "Rest is a crucial factor that more and more of us are getting less and less of," she says. "A striking feature of modern life is that there is almost a stigma about not being busy enough. The human body needs rest, and I'm not just talking about sleep."

There is evidence that mindfulness and meditation techniques dampen the activity of genes associated with inflammation. A team at the Brain, Belief and Behaviour Lab at Coventry University in the UK reviewed more than a decade's worth of studies analysing how our genes are affected by practices such as meditation, yoga and tai chi and a pattern emerged. It seems it doesn't matter which one you choose to take up, the result will be that your genes won't be activated as persistently to produce the cytokines that cause inflammation. More needs to be done to understand these effects at greater depth, but it seems worth taking up some sort of mind-body intervention in the meantime.

"It doesn't need to involve sitting cross-legged chanting 'om'," says Chandler. "There are a multitude of great apps, books and websites that describe techniques that are easy to learn."

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