

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE ROLE OF NUTRITION IN CHIROPRACTIC HEALTH CARE

If fish could discover things and unravel the mysteries of their environment, the last thing that would reveal itself would be water. It is so all-encompassing, so ubiquitous, that to see it apart from everything else would be a daunting task.

Understanding the mysteries of nutrition is the same for us.

Everyone eats. Living things eat, sick people eat, healthy people eat, so who cares? What does it have to do with MY back pain, sore muscles, headache, sciatica and on and on?

So much has been written, investigated, proven, unproven, re-written, denied, and re-affirmed in this field that it now takes an expert in biochemistry just to write a food label.

“Practical Nutrition” or simply advising the patient how to eat a diet that promotes a healthy body has been a cornerstone of Chiropractic practice since the earliest days of the profession. Nutrition as a major subject has been a requirement in chiropractic schools for over 50 years, placing chiropractors at the forefront of health science providers who are qualified to offer advice in this baffling field. In addition, the state of Wisconsin has required Doctors of Chiropractic to take advanced training in nutritional foundations before licensing them as “Nutritional counselors.”

After 40 years of practice, extensive post graduate study, and completing the state “Nutritional counselor” program, I feel it is time to simply present the basic facts of this complex topic in a form that is easy to understand and, hopefully, easy to apply for anyone seeking to improve their overall health.

First and foremost is understanding the role of inflammation in the body as a driving force behind virtually any and all disease processes. Simple “body fat” - that bulging paunch that makes your pants shrink after each holiday season or makes your belt shorten itself every few months - is now known to literally act like a separate organ in the body, one that promotes the release of inflammatory chemicals.

Yes, as bizarre as that sounds, “fat” can and does promote “inflammation” in the body. So, what is “inflammation”?

Inflammation is the driving force behind virtually ALL of life’s stressors in the body, including the aging process of each and every cell. Whether it is simply swelling in a nerve cell or a liver cell fighting for your very survival in a life and death disease struggle, all of these abnormal states and even the normal age related conditions are hampered by cells that are fighting their own “inflammation battles.” This weakens the immune system and promotes conditions that increase pain and lower the efficiency of the body’s defenses.

In addition to simple body fat, what else is a driving force of this inflammatory process? Is there something that can be done RIGHT NOW, to improve our health and help our body help itself? Is there some Vitamin, special diet, or particular food?

Well, the answers are surprisingly simple, and not so surprisingly, they may be a bit tough to apply.

The single biggest immediate and direct cause of the inflammatory response is something called the “GLYCEMIC INDEX”i.e., sugar - foods that stimulate a glucose pattern response in the body.

The most direct and powerful of these is simple sugar and sugary foods. Also, foods that typically contain corn or beet products and any foods that are quickly converted to “glucose” are also prone to promoting inflammation.

Now, glucose is a necessary fuel used by the body for every task we do. The brain runs on glucose. Without glucose we would cease to function; we would literally die. In fact the liver produces glucose from other sources of stored energy when we fail to provide it from our diet. However, this all occurs in a natural orderly fashion which creates optimal levels for our cells’ function. In a diabetic, for instance, this ability is compromised and artificial methods of maintaining normal blood sugar levels are required. This person needs insulin injections or some other external method of control. Without this control, the bodily functions are not compatible with life.

For a non-diabetic person experiencing any stressful condition - physical or emotional - levels of glucose in the blood become more critical. Even slight fluctuations and imbalances can add to the inefficiencies of the cells and the ability of the body to respond to and heal the malady. This is the heart of the inflammatory response.

So, what can you do?

In the long run, a balanced diet, high in “B” vitamins, with less than 25% of your total calories from fat, and at least 70% from naturally raised vegetables and whole grains, would be an ideal place to start a lifetime of optimum health, especially if you consider the role of antioxidant foods such as broccoli, fish oils, and organic sources.

In addition, enough time honored research has been done on the problems with processed foods, non-food treats, and starchy packaged fill-ins, to recommend that these be avoided altogether.

In the more appropriate short term, *IF* you are experiencing a health crisis (major OR relatively minor), you would do well to avoid simple sugars, ie: candy, pastries, ice cream, and any and all “simple” carbohydrates such as, white flour, bread, pasta, even crackers, corn products, any corn sugar or corn grain product - at least during the acute stage of the health problem.

As to the role of supplements in creating a healthy lifestyle, I believe there is one.

Many studies have also proven that the soil in our country has been over stressed with modern farming techniques. So much has been said on this subject, from so many different points of view, that it has become almost a banner topic in health foods stores. For this reason alone, it can and does make sense to supplement our normal diets with high quality nutrients on a regular basis. My personal recommendations have always been to eat organic, whole food, with a wide variety of choices; all meat should be from humanely treated, grass fed, minimally processed sources. Even eating in this manner, however, additional vitamins and mineral supplements may still be required to provide for all your nutritional needs.

Good nutrition is a major issue in our society today. The facts that eating healthy is so expensive; that organic food is the exception, not the norm; and that we pollute our most basic and essential elements for life, water and air, are the most obvious sign that our society has inverted our most basic values and common sense priorities.

The single most important step we can take is to re-align our personal priorities by paying due respect to what is our most intimate responsibility, our own lives. Respect our body by feeding it the food and nourishments that it was designed to use, laugh-off the silly popular food fad ads, and look for the healthy, low inflammatory, low glycemc-index foods that sustain us, nurture us and promote health throughout our cells.