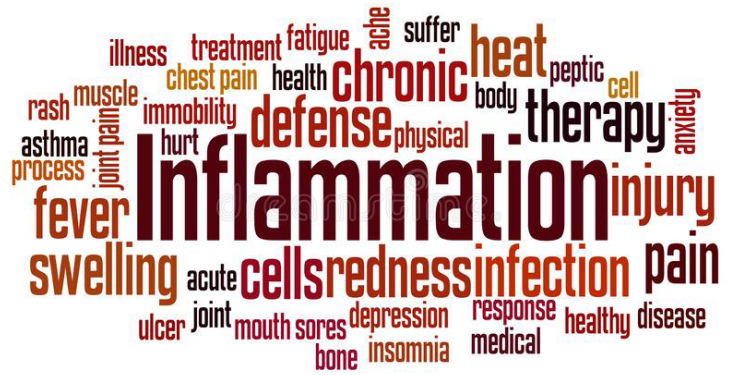


Can We Develop Chronic Inflammation from Food?



Inflammation has become a buzzword in today’s health world, though it’s poorly understood. So, let’s start there.

Acute inflammation is a good thing! It helps keep us alive. In response to injury or infection, our immune system signals an immediate response, sending helper cells (white blood cells) to clean up and repair the site. Imagine a small cut on your finger. Within seconds of the initial sting, the surrounding skin turns red, puffs and generates heat. That’s the result of your capillaries opening up to transport a truckload of macrophage cells to gobble up invaders (bacteria and foreign particles). Macrophages produce *cytokines*, a collection of chemical communicators that signal the need to recruit more (or less) help.

Acute means the inflammation is relatively short-lived – it’s resolved within days to weeks.

But what if it never goes away? What if the cytokine storm persists in response to a never-ending source of insult? Then it’s called *chronic inflammation*, and it spells trouble with a capital *T*. It erodes the inner lining of *all* your blood vessels. The lining is called *endothelium*, and when damaged it allows bad stuff (like oral bacteria and small cholesterol droplets) to invade and thicken blood vessel walls. Many refer to this as a “plaque.” This is how *chronic systemic inflammation* (CSI) is at the root cause of our number one disease, cardiovascular (heart) disease.

Chronic inflammation has infectious root causes such as gum disease, but also *noninfectious* triggers like obesity, insulin resistance and food sensitivities.

And it turns out, you don’t need *specific* food sensitivities to develop CSI. Ultra-processed food inflames all by itself. It’s less

about the food and more about the way it’s processed, including preservatives, flavor enhancers, sweeteners, thickeners, coloring agents, etc.

Consider the difference between a plain Frito and a Dorito. A Frito, while it’s certainly not deemed the healthiest, has only three ingredients: corn, oil and salt. A Dorito has more than 44. It’s hard to know the exact number since some of the chemicals listed are proprietary blends and their true makeup is undisclosed. I’m not trying to demonize any particular “food” but only to create a healthy respect for the added work it takes your body to clean up the chemical spill caused from just one chip.

Some conditions that are linked to a pro-inflammatory diet are COPD; arthritis; and gut issues such as IBS, UC, Leaky Gut and Crohn’s.

How can you reduce inflammation? Start by achieving healthy gums and boycotting ultra-processed foods/drinks. Next, check out the Mediterranean diet. It’s the most widely studied because the Mediterranean population has the least dietary inflammation. It’s low in sugar and has a broad range of vegetables, fruits, nuts, legumes, healthy fats and whole grains. It’s also considered the easiest to sustain because we don’t have to deprive ourselves of any one macronutrient. Yes, it requires some food prep – and, no, you can’t get it from a drive-thru window. But a little extra work to reduce your inflammation is a gift you can give yourself in 2023.



Dr. Susan Maples is a dentist in Holt. She is also a speaker, health educator, and author of “BlabberMouth! 77 Secrets Only Your Mouth Can Tell You to Live a Healthier, Happier, Sexier Life” and “Brave Parent: Raising Healthy, Happy Kids (Against All Odds) in Today’s World.” Reach her at Susan@DrSusanMaples.com



Total Health Dentistry
Susan Maples, DDS | Tracey Epley, DMD

Total-Health-Dentistry.com
517-694-0353