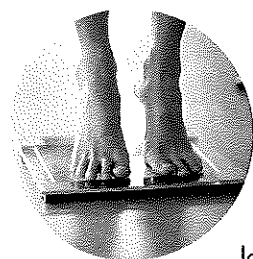


Surprising Triggers Of Inflammation

Lifestyle changes may calm your disease and make you feel better.

Reining in runaway inflammation is essential for managing arthritis, especially autoimmune, inflammatory varieties such as rheumatoid arthritis (RA) and psoriatic arthritis. Taking your medications as prescribed is essential, but certain lifestyle changes may lower inflammation, too. For instance, smoking sparks inflammation, says rheumatologist Susan Goodman, MD, of the Hospital for Special Surgery in New York City, so the choice is simple: Don't. These other inflammation triggers may be less obvious.



1 Weight Gain

Body fat produces chemicals that promote low-grade inflammation, explains Dr. Goodman. The more fat you carry, the higher your blood levels of these chemicals – another reason, beyond lightening the load on joints, to lose pounds if you're overweight.



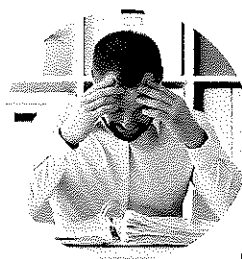
2 The Wrong Foods

Familiar dietary culprits like sugar, saturated fat (in dairy and fatty meats) and trans fats (in processed snacks) boost inflammation, while healthy choices like fruit, vegetables, whole grains and fatty fish (such as salmon) help keep it in check. Don't forget herbs and spices: Research shows ginger, rosemary and turmeric have anti-inflammatory properties.



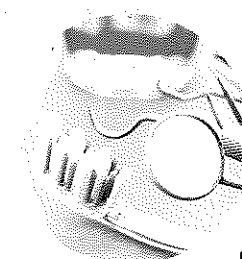
3 Too Little Exercise

Physical activity reduces levels of inflammatory chemicals, including tumor necrosis factor alpha (TNF-alpha) and interleukin (IL) 6 – two proteins targeted by biologic drugs. According to one 2014 study in *Nutrition, Metabolism and Cardiovascular Diseases*, every hour of sofa time you swap for exercise can lower IL-6 by 24 percent.



4 Stress

Feeling stressed causes changes in the brain that may alter the immune system and increase inflammation. One study found that levels of IL-8, a key cause of inflammation, dropped in RA patients who took a stress-management course. Find a stress buster that works for you, such as yoga, prayer or meditation.



5 A Dirty Mouth

Poor oral hygiene allows plaque to form on your teeth, not only causing cavities and gum disease, but also generating inflammatory chemicals such as prostaglandins and TNF-alpha. The good news: Regular brushing and flossing can ease the problem. See your dental hygienist every six months.



6 Too Little Sleep

A 2013 study involving 5,003 adults, published in the *American Journal of Epidemiology*, found that every hour of lost sleep increases levels of the inflammation marker C-reactive protein (CRP) by 8 percent, while IL-6 rises 4.5 percent. If you are having trouble sleeping, ask your doctor about options.



7 Air Pollution

Living near a busy road may increase the risk for RA, possibly from inhaling car exhaust, according to research. This dovetails with another study that found lab animals exposed to air pollutants release white blood cells that spark inflammation. People in polluted cities who installed air purifiers in their homes reduced their levels of chronic inflammation, according to a 2015 study in the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*. —TIMOTHY GOWER