

The Naturopathic Management of Pain and Inflammation

By Dr. Deidre Macdonald, N.D.

The primary reason why people seek the advice of health professionals is that they have some sort of muscular, joint or spinal pain. Injury to tissues, whether from physical trauma, toxicity in the body or other causes, initiates inflammatory processes leading to pain. Inflammation is the body's attempt to protect the stressed area. It is when the inflammation becomes excessive or uncontrolled that we may begin to see delayed healing or chronic inflammatory conditions.

Many drugs are available that help to reduce inflammation and relieve pain. They work by interfering with the body's natural inflammatory response mechanisms, however they are not without side effects, particularly when chronically used. Research clearly indicates that anti-inflammatory drugs may produce short-term benefits, but can actually accelerate the progression of joint destruction and cause more problems in the future. Also, many people with chronic pain find their medication irritates their stomach causing ulcers and bleeding. More people die each year as a result of peptic ulcers caused by anti-inflammatory medication than from cocaine abuse. Alternatively, natural medicines can provide effective anti-inflammatory and pain control with far fewer side effects. Many of the most successful natural anti-inflammatory medicines have demonstrated impressive side benefits instead of side effects.

Diet is an important way that pain sufferers can help themselves. Consuming a healthy diet filled with whole foods, fish, flax seeds and low in animal fats and refined carbohydrates actually lowers the inflammation in the body that causes pain and other diseases. Clinically, when I have assessed my clients' food allergies and developed an appropriate dietary treatment plan, I have seen consistent improvements in both muscular and joint pain. Scientifically, reducing the consumption of food allergens has been proven to reduce inflammation and is an essential feature in the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis and bursitis in particular. Detoxifying the body and eliminating candida yeast overgrowth also helps to reduce pain and inflammation. Toxic build up in the body causes toxic build up in the muscles, fascia and lymphatic system. I recommend that patients with chronic pain (especially fibromyalgia) be assessed for liver and bowel dysfunction by a trained naturopathic physician. Keeping weight down can help prevent wear and tear on the joints that can cause osteoarthritis, so getting some professional coaching in this area may make all the difference for your knees and hips.

In addition to an excellent diet, natural medicines can be a key part of your plan to overcome acute or chronic pain. The following are some of the proven remedies I use to treat muscle and joint pain and inflammation. However, I must stress the importance of consulting a naturopathic physician and developing an individualized treatment plan to facilitate your journey to wellness.

Fish oil is a concentrated source of the omega 3 fatty acid called eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA). Taking a top quality, purified fish oil supplement can significantly reduce inflammatory responses. Studies have shown fish oil to benefit people with rheumatoid arthritis and it also has many other health benefits.

Bromelain is a plant derived anti-inflammatory medicine that has had over 200 scientific papers appear in the medical literature. Research has shown it to increase joint mobility and decrease swelling in osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis and gout. It is used to treat sports injuries, bruising, muscle and joint pain. It is often used in conjunction with a well studied natural anti-inflammatory medicine called **curcumin**, which is derived from tumeric. Not only has curcumin been shown to produce significant anti-inflammatory effects and pain reduction, it is one of the more promising anti-cancer natural medicines.

Kaprex is a blend of rosemary extract, luduxin, and oleanolic acid shown in clinical studies to produce a 50% reduction in joint discomfort. These results are as good or better than prescription pain medication, but they come *without* side effects. Kaprex is easy on the gastrointestinal tract, unlike ibuprofen, indometh, naproxen and more.

Homeopathic **Arnica** is the most commonly prescribed homeopathic medicine. It is used to reduce inflammation, pain and shock in acute trauma like bruising, sprains and strains, surgery, childbirth and more. It can be helpful for managing flare ups of chronic pain conditions as well. Other homeopathic medicines to consider are **Ruta** for ligament injury and damage to the periosteum and **Rhus tox** for joints that ache in the morning or after sitting and loosen up with movement.

These recommendations, in addition to physical treatments such as chiropractic manipulations or **Bowen therapy** (see getwellhere.com), can help you move more easily and thereby enjoy life to the fullest!

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