

Opinion: Good nutrition makes a difference

By Lynn Norton

In January, studies in the Journal of American College of Cardiology and JAMA Internal Medicine discussed heart disease. Some findings are familiar: poor diet, an inactive lifestyle, smoking, heavy alcohol consumption, and obesity are all linked to heart disease. But another risk factor is gaining attention: chronic inflammation.



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Chronic inflammation is not a swollen knee or a full stomach. It relates to our body's ability to combat disease. Our bodies have an immune response to fight injury or sickness, but chronic inflammation occurs when these messages go on for too long and cause healthy cells to be attacked and destroyed.

Just being overweight or obese can increase the body's inflammatory response. By shedding some pounds, exercising, and eating a nutrient-rich diet, you can reduce chronic inflammation. This, in turn, reduces your risk of heart and other serious diseases.

Here are five goals to reduce stress on the immune system and maintain a healthy heart.

Find healthy fats. Eat foods rich in Omega 3 and 6 fatty

acids, such as salmon, sardines, anchovies, olive oil, nuts, seeds and avocados.

Goal No. 1: Avoid coconut oil, palm oil, and trans-fats as well as saturated fats that come from meat and dairy.

Eat antioxidant-rich foods. Choose a diet rich in fruits and vegetables, including citrus, berries, cabbage, greens, onions, garlic, carrots, melon, broccoli, cauliflower and tomato products.

Goal No. 2: Eat at least five fruit and vegetable servings daily.

Choose whole, unprocessed grains. Examples of whole grains include whole wheat, bulgur, brown rice, barley, oats, millet, wild rice, and plain popcorn.

Goal No. 3: Half the grain products consumed should be whole grains. Cook with it, bake with it, or, if eating out, order it.

Eat less animal protein and keep it lean. Reduce meat portions and go meatless several days a week. Beans, tofu, and nuts are healthy protein alternatives. Trimmed and lean meats, skinless chicken, fish, egg whites and skim or 1% dairy products are also healthy options.

Goal No. 4: Eat fish twice a week.

Manage life's stresses. Get a good night's sleep and exercise regularly. Smoking or drinking two or more servings of alcohol a day is not a healthy way to unwind. Also, the newest "super food" or supplement is not a solution. Spend your money on fresh foods and your time in fresh air.

Goal No. 5: Exercise two to three hours a week and increase intensity as time goes on.

These goals are something we all can strive to achieve. Commit to healthy changes and reap the benefits of a longer, healthier life.

Lynn Norton provides nutrition services to patients at Barton

Health. She will give a free wellness lecture on March 4 from 6 -7pm at Lake Tahoe Community College.