

HEART HEALTHY



Inflammation, oxidation and supplementation

By Isaac Eliaz, MD

In the darker winter months, cardiovascular health usually doesn't bask in the same spotlight of attention as immune health. Most people view this chilly time of year as "cold and flu" season and ramp up their immune support while leaving heart health out in the cold. But since United States statistics report that a cardiovascular event (such as a heart attack) occurs every 25 seconds, taking measures to support your circulation and cardiovascular system is critical, especially during winter. The cooler weather and shorter days keep outdoor activities to a minimum, limiting many people to a more sedentary winter lifestyle. Combined with holiday indulgences and cold weather comfort foods, these seasonal realities can lead to weight gain and decreased circulation, resulting in inflammation and oxidative stress. In addition, reduced sunlight exposure makes vitamin D deficiency as well as depression—both proven risk factors for heart conditions—much more prevalent. So what can you do to make sure your heart stays strong and protected?

Fight Inflammation First and Foremost

Doctors now know that it's not necessarily cholesterol and fat that contribute directly to heart disease, but rather chronic inflammation, which damages the heart and circulatory system with the excessive wear and tear of oxidative stress—similar to an engine overheating. Oxidative stress happens when harmful "free radicals" (byproducts of toxins and normal cellular waste) run rampant, damaging

DNA and cellular integrity. Normally the body's antioxidant reserves would fight free radicals and repair their damage, but in cases of oxidative stress, antioxidants have been depleted through illness, exhaustion, stress, toxins, poor diet, lack of exercise and other causes. In addition to these risks, chronic inflammation also damages heart health by triggering the deadly process of fibrosis—uncontrolled scar tissue buildup in organs and tissues. Regulating oxidative stress and inflammation with hydration, a balance of adequate rest and exercise, a whole foods diet and supplementation with effective antioxidant and anti-inflammation formulas will offer critical long-term benefits.

Good Fats vs. Bad Fats: Know the Difference

Without adequate levels of good cholesterol and healthy fats, we are at an even greater risk for heart disease, as these beneficial lipids help to fight inflammation and provide critical antioxidants, nutrients and building blocks

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for health. The deciding factor here is what type of fats and cholesterol are circulating in your system: essential fatty acids (EFAs) and healthy omegas found in olive oil and fish oils for example, are critical for numerous areas of health. Trans fats and excess saturated fats found in most processed and fried foods, however, are harmful and damage cardiovascular and overall health by generating more free radicals and promoting further inflammation and oxidative stress.

Similarly, it is the quality of your cholesterol, rather than the quantity, which determines heart risks. The key issue with cholesterol, and one that is not widely recognized, is whether or not it is oxidized cholesterol. When cholesterol, particularly the LDL or “bad” cholesterol, becomes oxidized through chronic inflammation and oxidative stress, it turns into a deadly substance. Luckily, testing for cholesterol oxidation is simple and straightforward, and with a whole foods diet, regular exercise, healthy stress relief and the right supplementation, you can protect yourself from, and even reverse, cholesterol oxidation for optimal cardiovascular and overall health.

Get Moving!

Poor circulation creates a condition of stagnation, which in turn generates inflammation, as toxins are not efficiently removed and nutrient-rich blood flow is hindered. Thus, it’s important to keep your circulatory system well conditioned and running smoothly with brisk walks, yoga, qi gong, tai chi and other nourishing movement exercises.

Eat a Heart Healthy Diet

We all know by now that a balanced whole foods diet is essential for maintaining a healthy heart. As I mentioned, this includes an adequate supply of foods that are high in omegas and essential fatty acids (EFAs), which help to decrease inflammation and improve circulation, among other heart health benefits. Some of the best heart-healthy foods include:

- Beans: black and kidney beans are high in B-complex vitamins, folate and magnesium
- Nuts: almonds and walnuts are rich in omega-3 fatty acids, vitamin E, magnesium and fiber
- Fish: salmon, sardines and herring are high in omega-3 fatty acids and lower in mercury than other types of fish
- Greens: spinach, broccoli and kale are packed with lutein (a carotenoid), B-complex vitamins, potassium and fiber, as well as vitamins C and E

All-Natural Supplementation

My top recommendation for heart health is an ancient Tibetan herbal formula that has over 30 years of clinical research, offering strong antioxidant, immune, anti-inflammation and circulatory benefits. Another important daily supplement is modified citrus pectin, which protects heart health by inhibiting a molecule called galectin-3, which is found to be at the root of inflammation and →



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fibrosis-related diseases, including congestive heart failure. Other important heart nutrients include nattokinase, a clot-busting enzyme derived from fermented natto soybeans; hawthorn berry; Chinese salvia and medicinal mushrooms.

These simple yet powerful steps can improve not just your heart health, but your overall health as well, resulting in improved immunity, energy and well being, and protecting against a myriad of chronic ailments down the road.

For more information about maintaining long-term wellness and vitality, visit www.dreliaz.org.



Isaac Eliaz, MD, MS, LAc, has been a pioneer in integrative medicine since the early 1980s. He is a respected researcher, innovative product formulator, clinical practitioner, author and lecturer. Dr. Eliaz integrates his background in Western medicine with extensive knowledge of traditional Chinese, Tibetan, Ayurvedic, Homeopathic and complementary medical systems. With over 25 years of clinical experience and research, Dr. Eliaz offers a unique holistic approach to the relationship between health and disease, immune enhancement, detoxification and cancer prevention and treatment.



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