

Can the Tom Brady ‘Diet’ Help with Orthopedic Woes?

Steve Ditlea | For the Journal News | September 14, 2017

Every so often, medical awareness erupts into widespread enthusiasm for an original way of understanding and curbing human ailments: the germ theory, genetics, and DNA editing, to name a few. Now it's inflammation.

The latest micro-anatomical view attributes many recurring human ills to the body's defenses causing cells to swell up, in pursuit of faster recovery from immediate health threats. Long-term, this turns out to be the opposite of wellness.



Dr. Nicole Belkin, an orthopedic surgeon at New York Presbyterian Hudson Valley Hospital in Cortlandt Manor and Michael Martinez of Briarcliff Manor, prepare steamed broccoli with lemon vinaigrette during a class in anti-inflammatory foods in the Chef Peter X. Kelly Teaching Kitchen at the hospital in Cortlandt Manor Aug. 9, 2017. The class was led by Chef Emilie Berner. Dr. Belkin was taking part in the class as well as educating participants in anti-inflammatory foods.

Chronic inflammation has been linked to Alzheimer's, cancer, diabetes and heart disease, as well as muscle fatigue and joint pain.

What we eat could have a major impact on the inflammation response.

New England Patriots quarterback Tom Brady, still running and passing masterfully in National Football League arenas beyond age 40, attributes his longevity to a strict anti-inflammation food regimen, which he shares with his wife, international supermodel Gisele Bündchen.



New England Patriots QB Tom Brady feels a diet rich in anti-inflammatory foods has kept him fit.

According to the couple's chef, Allen Campbell, their diet is 80 percent veggie, 20 percent lean meat and fish, with no sugar, white flour, dairy, coffee, alcohol, nor nightshade plants — that means no bell pepper, eggplant, potato and tomato. This latter part remains hardest to swallow, without credible evidence from nutritional studies. Along with a self-imposed ban on mushrooms, the Brady-Bündchen bunch (including their two children) dine on a restrictive diet that may not be recommended for most anti-inflammation seekers. In fact, research has found cell-calming nutrients can be found in tomatoes, eggplants, and yes, mushrooms.

“Mushrooms are high in anti-oxidants. They're not necessary to cut out to achieve an anti-inflammatory diet,” says Dr. Nicole Belkin, a specialist in orthopedic surgery and orthopedic sports medicine at New York-Presbyterian Hudson Valley Hospital in Cortlandt.

She stays on top of the latest in food science to offer patients alternatives to surgery. “If someone is having a knee replacement, they should feel confident they've tried every non-invasive treatment to achieve symptomatic improvement necessary for their quality of life.”

A 12-week trial of better eating is typically enough to observe a major lessening in pain level in a significant number of patients. It can also help with weight loss, athletic performance, and social-psychological well-being.

That's why Dr. Belkin is open to a variety of anti-inflammatory food approaches. “If you're following a Paleo diet, you would cut out nightshades,” she says, citing the popular protein-slanted regimen. “They are a higher glycemic, lower fiber foods, but I would not recommend that all my patients cut them out to achieve the value of an anti-inflammatory diet.”

Whole Food for Thought

Dr. Belkin advises us all to curb swelling-linked eats. “The most common effect of the American diet is inflammation,” she explains. Blood vessels are especially susceptible to constriction, resulting in further problems: “Everything passes through the bloodstream, with vascular links to joints and organs. When the blood system is inefficient, it predisposes your body to damage.”

Dr. Belkin’s remedy is straightforward. “I explain to patients the value of whole foods in natural form, eliminating the processing that typically strips essential nutrients and fiber from what we eat.”

The specific path followed may be less important than the intended goal. “Some people call it the Mediterranean diet. Some people follow the Zone diet.” What matters are the biochemical functions of chemicals like omega fatty acids in olive oil and lean fish and anti-inflammatory compounds in blueberries and avocados.

Cooking for Life



Spanish Mackerel with steamed broccoli with lemon vinaigrette were two of the dishes prepared during a class in anti-inflammatory foods in the Chef Peter X. Kelly Teaching Kitchen at New York Presbyterian Hudson Valley Hospital in Cortlandt Manor Aug. 9, 2017. The class was led by Chef Emilie Berner.

To gain a swift immersion into a cell-soothing, healthful diet, you can take a course like “Plant Power: Anti-inflammatory Cooking,” at New York-Presbyterian Hudson Valley Hospital’s Chef Peter X. Kelly Teaching Kitchen.

Conducted by Chef Emilie Berner, coordinator of the hospital’s Harvest for Health program for patients and community, this 90-minute practical overview highlights dishes with anti-inflammation ingredients including cinnamon, garlic, ginger and turmeric.

Berner’s approach to anti-inflammatory cuisine is similar to the Mediterranean diet, incorporating vegetables, legumes and grains with few restrictions (yes, you can eat mushrooms). “The Mediterranean diet may become the diet of choice for diminishing chronic inflammation in clinical practice,” notes this advocate of whole food, plant-rich cooking.



Chef Emilie Berner pours freshly made almond milk through a cheese cloth as she teaches a class in anti-inflammatory foods in the Chef Peter X. Kelly Teaching Kitchen at New York Presbyterian Hudson Valley Hospital in Cortlandt Manor Aug. 9, 2017.

Amid the foods she cites as anti-inflammatory “super stars” are fish containing polyunsaturated fatty acids like mackerel, salmon, trout and tuna; fruit like red grapefruit and guava for their lycopene and astaxanthin (tomatoes, too); and red wine for its resveratrol. Judging from such flavorful choices, you could adopt anti-inflammation eating just because it tastes so good.