NUTRITION & CHRONIC PAIN
Chronic pain (including nerve, muscle and tissue pain) is pain that persists for months, or even years, and can significantly affect one’s quality of life. Many types of injuries and disorders can lead to the development of chronic pain, although inflammation is often the underlying cause of the pain itself. Commonly affected areas include the back, neck, shoulders and other parts of the body.

There are many varied approaches to a holistic plan of chronic pain management; medications can certainly help, but physical activity and dietary changes can also play an important healing role. Many natural supplements are also available which provide pain relief without the side effects of conventional medications.

**DIETARY CHANGES**

While no specific food can completely eliminate chronic pain, some foods may improve it by reducing inflammation, while others can worsen pain by promoting inflammation. Here are some tips for following an “anti-inflammatory” diet for chronic pain:

**GOOD FATS VS BAD FATS**

Saturated fats found in red meat, high fat dairy products (including butter) and eggs promote inflammation in the body. Trans fat (a man-made fat used in the production of some margarines, baked goods and fried foods) and certain vegetable oils such as corn oil, also increase the production of pro-inflammatory compounds.

Swap these items for healthier fats that suppress inflammation, by consuming avocados, walnuts, almonds, extra virgin olive oil and ground flax seeds. Oily, cold-water fish such as salmon and mackerel are rich sources of a special type of healthy fat; known as omega-3 essential fatty acids, they have anti-inflammatory properties that may be particularly beneficial for chronic pain.
REPLACE WHITE FLOUR AND SUGAR WITH WHOLE GRAINS

Processed and refined grain products made with white flour and sugary foods have been linked to an increase in inflammation. If your cupboards at home are stocked with white bread, pasta, rice or cereal, make the trade to their whole grain counterparts. Foods such as whole grain pasta and bread, brown rice, quinoa and bulgur are full of fibre and can help offset pain-inducing inflammation.

BOOST YOUR INTAKE OF FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

Increasing the amount of fresh fruits and vegetables in the diet seems to help with chronic pain. The natural pigments that impart deep orange, yellow and green colours to fruits and vegetables have powerful antioxidant properties that neutralize free radicals. These are harmful compounds that promote oxidative stress in the body, and have been linked to an increase in sensitivity to pain. Fruits and vegetables are also rich sources of fibre, another dietary component that is helpful in the fight against inflammation. Vegetarian and vegan diets have both been shown to reduce inflammation, and therefore may be helpful for those who suffer from various types of chronic pain.

Here are some tips for incorporating more inflammatory-fighting fruits and vegetables into your diet:

• Toss some berries onto a bowl of yogurt, oatmeal or whole grain cereal for breakfast
• Enjoy a fresh fruit or “green” vegetable smoothie
• Instead of chips, have some carrot and celery sticks dipped in salsa or hummus
• Add slices of tomato, cucumber or peppers to sandwiches at lunch
• Keep your fridge or freezer stocked with pre-cut, fresh or frozen vegetables for convenient use in soups, salads, stir fries and omelettes

ELIMINATION DIET

If you suspect a certain food aggravates your chronic pain or causes it to worsen in intensity, you can try an elimination diet and completely remove the food from your diet for a period of two weeks. During this time, record everything you eat, when you eat it and note any changes in pain that you experience. After the two week period, re-introduce the suspected “trigger” foods one at a time, waiting at least two days in between each, and note any changes in pain. If you find that removing certain foods from your diet provides temporary pain relief, talk to a healthcare professional before completely eliminating it from your diet to reduce the risk of becoming deficient in any nutrients over the long term.