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Aging and inflammation



If you're someone who plans ahead—you keep your finances in order, maintain your home, and map out your next chapter before embarking—you already understand the value of routine maintenance. The same principle applies to your health. And one of the determinants of health that's often overlooked? The potential for chronic inflammation.

A certain amount of acute inflammation is necessary in life, kicking in to protect your body when a virus or bacteria invades. In these instances, your immune system rushes in to help and then backs off after healing has occurred. When your immune system doesn't quit, you have chronic inflammation, or what scientists call *inflammaging*. It can creep in with age. Starting around age fifty, the immune system can get a little too enthusiastic, overproducing cytokines and other inflammatory cells. That means your body might stay stuck in "attack mode." Over time, that extra wear and tear can lay the groundwork for other health-related challenges. Evidence is growing that chronic inflammation is involved with many problems common in aging, such as heart disease, some cancers, Alzheimer's, and Parkinson's.

But here's the good news: you can help your body calm the fire.

Stop the spark starters. There are certain habits that keep the flames alive—such as smoking, too much alcohol, or chronic stress. They send false alarms to your immune system. Carrying extra weight can be a factor too, since fat cells release inflammation-promoting cytokines. Even small changes in these areas can make a big difference in how your body feels and functions.

Fuel the cleanup crew. Healthy habits help curb chronic inflammation. Regular movement, even a brisk walk five days a week, helps your body get back in balance. A stress-reduction practice such as mindfulness or tai chi can cue your immune system that it's time to ease up its attack. Quality sleep (seven to eight hours) gives your brain time to do its nightly cleanup. And your diet? Make it colorful and whole: leafy greens, berries, beans, nuts, olive oil, and fatty fish such as salmon. Consider exploring the Mediterranean and DASH diets with your health provider.

These lifestyle changes are an investment in your future. Chronic inflammation is one marker of how well your body is aging. Staying on top of it means staying strong, sharp, and ready for what's next. You've worked hard to build a life you love. Help protect your body so you can keep enjoying it.

**Want to learn more about aging and wellness?
Give us a call at 206-456-5155.**



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Aging Wisdom supports individuals and families in King and south Snohomish Counties as they plan for aging.



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