

‘Overly sanitized’ environments? Unraveling why diseases tied to chronic inflammation are spiking in the developed world

In a [recent article](#) published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, [[Professor Thom McDade](#), a biological anthropologist at Northwestern University] detailed research he conducted in the Philippines and Ecuador showing that chronic inflammation is relatively rare among people who don’t live Western-style lifestyles, and it is not inevitable with age.

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“In many ways, chronic low-grade inflammation can be considered another ‘disease of affluence,’ a mismatch between our evolved biology and historically recent societal conditions that extend average life expectancies but also increase burdens of non-communicable diseases,” McDade wrote.

McDade’s idea is closely related to the widely evidenced [“hygiene hypothesis,”](#) which blames overly sanitized conditions for increasing rates of allergies and other autoimmune disorders in developed countries.

Is there a remedy for widespread chronic inflammation? Proper diet and regular exercise can help, as they do for almost any ailment. But if McDade’s hypothesis is correct, a longer-term cure is providing the immune system with reasonable adversity early on. Parents don’t have to let their kids crawl around landfills, but a little more [dogs](#) and dirt and a little less hand sanitizer and antibacterials seem reasonable.

[This is an excerpt. Read the full article here](#)