

GOOD CONNECTIONS

Arthritis is a debilitating condition that affects the joints. Choosing the right foods can help to alleviate pain and perhaps slow down its progression.

Words by **Polly Rea, naturopath**

The word arthritis literally means “inflammation of the joint” and is derived from the Greek “arthron” (joint) and Latin “itis” (inflammation). Although often referred to as a single condition, arthritis is an umbrella term for different musculoskeletal conditions including osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, gout, ankylosing spondylitis and psoriatic arthritis. The commonality of these is the inflammation that exists where two bones meet: the joint.

Osteoarthritis (OA) is the most prevalent form, and is often referred to as the “wear and tear” arthritis. It involves the entire joint, including bone and cartilage. It is caused by the gradual loss of articular cartilage and underlying subchondral bone. Typically it affects knee, hip, hand and spine joints.

The articular cartilage is the smooth connective tissue that covers the ends of bones where they come together to form joints. It is stiff yet flexible and acts as a cushion, serving as a shock absorber. When this cartilage is healthy, it is easier to move, allowing the bones to glide over each other with very little friction. The subchondral bone sits at the rounded end of bones and is said to have a role in the metabolism of the articular cartilage. Therefore, these two aspects of the joint work together to provide strong but mobile joints. At the joining of two bones, you have subchondral bone at the end of one, then articular cartilage and then subchondral bone at the end of the next joining bone. It is the gradual degeneration of this entire joint area that is known as osteoarthritis.

MANAGING OSTEOARTHRITIS

The onset of OA is subtle – the first symptom is generally morning joint stiffness, then pain that worsens with prolonged joint use, relieved by rest. This may lead to general loss of function of the area.

In treating OA, initially the main objective is management of pain. It is then important to consider preserving the function of the affected joint and preventing further damage. To manage the pain, anti-inflammatory treatment is beneficial. Essential fatty acids, particularly the omega 3 variety, will provide lubrication for the joints as well anti-inflammatory effects. Ginger and turmeric are also very valuable anti-inflammatory herbs.

Nutritionist
Susan Buxton



GOUT & DIET

Gout is a painful form of arthritis, triggered by a build-up of uric acid in the blood. If too much uric acid accumulates it can form crystals on the joints, which cause the joint to swell and become painful. If left untreated gout can cause lasting damage to your joints and kidneys.

Normally excess uric acid is excreted in your urine. However, kidney problems, being overweight, certain medications and a diet rich in purines can cause your body to produce too much uric acid or struggle to dispose of it correctly. Purines are generally found in higher concentrations in animal proteins like meat, chicken and seafood. For those suffering from gout, altering your diet can help to reduce the occurrence of further attacks.

Diet recommendations for gout sufferers are to reduce the amount of meat and shellfish that you eat and try to eat more plant-based proteins instead of meat. Have some alcohol-free days each week and drink plenty of water to flush out the uric acid in the body.

To preserve function of the joint and prevent further damage, doing what we can to promote cartilage synthesis is important. Glucosamine is found in the cartilage and chondroitin in both cartilage and bone. Given the involvement of both cartilage and bone in OA it is important to provide both of these nutrients concurrently. Vitamin A, E, B6, zinc and copper are also important for the synthesis of cartilage, aiding in preserving the integrity of the joint. Many OA patients are copper deficient and, when used topically, copper has shown anti-inflammatory effects. This is why many OA patients wear a copper bangle.

Other important nutrients to consider in the promotion of cartilage synthesis are vitamin D and boron. Boron is involved in the synthesis of vitamin D and has been used for many years in treating OA. Studies show that vitamin D may slow the progression and possibly help prevent the development of OA.

It's also important OA sufferers consider physical elements, such as the maintenance of ideal weight. Taking the stress of extra weight off the joints can be beneficial in slowing the progress of the disease.

We hear all the time about the effects of oxidative stress and its influence on disease. There is no exception with OA, as oxidation is also believed to contribute to the progression of the disease. It is therefore important to provide high levels of antioxidants to protect against oxidative damage and reduce inflammation. Vitamin C is a great antioxidant and promotes cartilage health.

Avoiding foods that create an acidic environment such as coffee, alcohol and sugar is also important. Nightshade vegetables such as potato, tomato, eggplant and capsicum are also known to aggravate arthritic conditions and should be avoided if possible.

Remember to always seek professional advice from your naturopath or chosen health practitioner to meet your individual needs.



MINDFOOD.COM

Discover more foods which can help ease painful inflammation.

KEYWORDS: INFLAMMATION, FOOD



Oysters

Oysters provide good levels of vitamin D and zinc, which are both important minerals for the maintenance of normal cartilage. Try some oysters as your next entree when dining out.



Almonds And Raisins

Try making a trail mix of unsalted almonds combined with raisins to enjoy as a snack. These both contain boron, an important trace mineral, which is very valuable in treating arthritis.



Dark Leafy Greens

These green gems are full of folic acid and are very alkalising to the whole body. Arthritis is a very acidic condition and alkalising the body will help to decrease the progression of the disease.



Pumpkin Seeds

These crunchy and satisfying seeds are a great addition to any salad with the added benefit of good copper levels. Arthritis sufferers are often deficient in copper so increasing levels through diet is beneficial.



Vitamin C

Citrus fruits are high in vitamin C and also have an alkalising effect on the body, therefore reducing any acidity associated with arthritis. Vitamin C is an important antioxidant that helps to build cartilage.



Wholegrains

Wholegrains are a valuable source of B6, a nutrient that aids in joint mobility. Add some wholegrain cooked quinoa or brown rice to your dinner. You may even find you sleep better, too.

POLLY REA IS A NATUROPATH AT IFEEL DANDI/FEELDANDI.COM. PHOTOGRAPHY: THINKSTOCK