

ARTHRITIS

Arthritis, literally, is defined as inflammation of one or more joints, characterised by swelling, warmth, redness of the overlying skin, pain and restriction of movement.

Certain dietary factors can influence joint inflammation and related problems. Some nutrients will improve health and vitality and help slow down the process of degeneration. Other foods have been found to encourage joint inflammation, including allergic responses to foods.

ALLERGIES AND INTOLERANCE

Allergies or intolerance to certain foods can cause or exacerbate joint inflammation.

The Nightshade family- these are tomato, aubergine, peppers, chillies, potato and tobacco. Avoiding these foods helps to reduce pain and inflammation.

Other foods commonly found to worsen arthritic conditions are white flour, cheese, orange, cow's milk, lemon, coffee, soy, grapefruits, strawberries, pork (including bacon, ham, sausages), shellfish, and caffeine,

BODY WEIGHT

Reducing weight can decrease the problems involved with osteoarthritis when more strain is placed on the weight-bearing joints, accelerating wear and tear. You may be advised to follow a weight-loss programme including dietary changes and gentle, regular exercise.

DIETARY FACTORS

Acid/alkaline foods

The concept that acids are bad for the joints and alkalis good is a strong one in folk culture. It is widely understood that the body has to eliminate acid metabolites and that joint problems are a classic outcome of the failure to do this. Many traditional herbal remedies used to treat joint disease are known to increase their elimination. It is therefore recommended that you reduce acidic foods in the diet. NB. This means foods that leave an acidic residue after digestion NOT that taste acidic like citrus and other fruits. The main examples are:

- Meat and meat products, processed meats being the worst
- Cheese
- Eggs
- Sugar based products
- Vinegars and pickles

The best source of alkaline foods is fruit and vegetables

Fats and oils have a neutral rating, and fish and grains, legumes, nuts and seeds are mostly acid (due to protein content) but much less so than those foods listed above.

Wine, tea and coffee and other plant-based beverages are generally alkaline when taken without milk

From the advice above a mainly vegetarian or even vegan diet is recommended that includes fish but relies on legumes/beans/nuts/seeds/grains for the source of protein rather than dairy products. There is some support for the suggestion that vegetarians have less likelihood of arthritic disease.

Minerals

A high intake of minerals is essential for optimum bone health, not only in conditions like osteoporosis but also arthritic disorders. Include plenty of mineral-rich foods in your diet, especially foods high in calcium and magnesium.

Vitamin D is required for calcium absorption, sufficient levels can be obtained from regular exposure to sunshine. Magnesium and other trace minerals are also known to play an important role in enhancing calcium absorption and use by the body.

Mineral-rich foods:

Leafy greens - broccoli, watercress, spinach, cabbage

Whole grains - brown rice, millet, buckwheat

Legumes

Sprouted seeds and pulses

Seaweed

Dried fruit, nuts and seeds

Blue green algae - e.g. spirulina, chlorella

Herbal teas - nettle, horsetail, raspberry leaf

Avoid:

Some factors inhibit the absorption of calcium and other minerals and should therefore be avoided in rheumatic and arthritic conditions. Others may affect general elimination; hence the following should be avoided where possible:

Excess animal protein (meat, dairy, eggs)

Refined sugars, including cakes and biscuits

Excess salt

Alcohol

Tobacco

Caffeine (tea, coffee, chocolate, some fizzy drinks)

Oxalic acid rich foods - rhubarb, gooseberries, black and red currants, cranberries, plum, chard, spinach)

Essential Fatty Acids

Scientific evidence has shown that essential fatty acids found in foods can be of benefit to arthritic conditions. Rich sources of essential fatty acids include oily fish; nuts and seeds; and raw, cold pressed vegetable oils).

Oily fish - mackerel, herring, sardines, salmon

Nuts and seeds - almonds, walnuts, sunflower seeds, linseeds, pumpkin and sesame seeds

Cold pressed vegetable oils - sunflower, safflower, sesame, olive, and walnut

Olive oil especially extra virgin olive oil for cooking and the following oils raw and cold pressed: sunflower, safflower and walnut for salad dressing