

Osteoarthritis and Diet

What is osteoarthritis?

Osteoarthritis is the breakdown and inflammation of joint cartilage, usually brought on by aging and repetitive joint usage. Osteoarthritis also is known as degenerative arthritis.

What treatments are available?

Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as Advil[®] or Motrin[®], are often recommended. Some new prescription drugs are becoming available that seem to treat the pain of arthritis as effectively as NSAIDs, but without as many undesirable side effects. Sometimes physical therapy, corticosteroid injections, and surgery also are recommended.

What about exercise?

Swimming, flexibility exercises, and some weight-bearing exercises help to moderate the pain in some people. Correct form is extremely important. Repetitive, high-impact movements are not recommended.

What about my diet?

Weight loss helps many people alleviate some of the pain of arthritis.

It's important to consume enough foods that contain calcium and vitamin D. Low levels of vitamin D are associated with more rapid progression of osteoarthritis.

Vitamin D is found in:

- Fish-liver oil
- Butter and cream
- Egg yolks
- Liver
- Fortified cow's milk
- Fortified dairy products, such as cheese and yogurt
- Fortified cereals

Calcium is found in:

- Dark green, leafy vegetables, such as kale and broccoli
- Canned sardines and salmon with bones
- Fortified orange juice
- Milk
- Dairy products, such as cheese and yogurt
- Fortified bread
- Fortified soy milk
- Some forms of tofu (depends on the processing technique)

Vitamin C is important for building cartilage and may benefit people with osteoarthritis.

Vitamin C can be found in:

- Spinach

- Broccoli
- Sweet potatoes
- Tomato juice
- Oranges
- Strawberries
- Watermelon
- Grapefruit juice
- Red bell peppers
- Kiwi
- Mangoes
- Brussels sprouts
- Pineapple

It also is recommended that people with osteoarthritis increase their intake of omega-3 fatty acids. Omega-3 fatty acids are found in:

- Fish oil—salmon, tuna, mackerel, anchovies, herring, sardines, lake trout
- Canola oil
- Butternuts and walnuts
- Soybeans and soybean oil
- Flaxseed

Are there any other diet tips that might help?

Many diet books and “magic pills” are promoted as useful for treating osteoarthritis symptoms. Many of these products are fraudulent. However, some studies have shown benefits from certain nutritional and herbal supplementations.

- Some studies have shown that boron is possibly helpful to people with osteoarthritis.

The best sources of boron are:

- Apples
- Legumes
- Leafy vegetables
- Carrots
- Pears
- Grapes
- Grains
- Some drinking water (depending on geographical location)
- Glucosamine and chondroitin sulfate are proven in numerous studies to help ease joint pain and improve movement, although results are not conclusive.
- Ginger is hypothesized to aid in pain relief for people with arthritis.
- Studies are looking at green tea’s anti-inflammatory properties for possible benefit in people with osteoarthritis.

References

Dorfman L. Medical nutrition therapy for rheumatic disorders. In: Mahan LK, Escott-Stump S. *Krause's food, nutrition, and diet therapy*. 11th ed. Philadelphia, PA: WB Saunders; 2004:1121-1126.

National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases. Arthritis. Available at: http://www.niams.nih.gov/Health_Info/Osteoarthritis/default.asp. Accessed February 18, 2008.

WebMD. Arthritis diet & supplements: do they work? Available at: <http://www.webmd.com/osteoarthritis/guide/arthritis-diets-supplements>. Accessed February 16, 2008.

MedicineNet. Diet and osteoarthritis. Available at: <http://www.medicinenet.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=15021>. Accessed February 16, 2008.

Review Date 3/08
G-0565