



# Osteoarthritis

## OVERVIEW

Arthritis is a general name, given to several conditions that affect the joints, causing pain and limiting mobility. One of the most common of these is osteoarthritis (OA). OA is a degenerative joint disease due to destruction of cartilage. Articular cartilage wears away, until the underlying bone is exposed. Onset is gradual, with pain increasing imperceptibly over month to years. Movements become restricted. Joints like the hip demonstrate deformity in later stages. **It is not usually associated with inflammatory symptoms.**

It can be caused by wear and tear of the joints themselves or formation of bony spurs within the joints and associated with over-use, trauma to the joints or old age. Painkillers, anti-inflammatory or even steroids injected directly into the affected joints can relieve osteoarthritic pain, but people with OA must be careful, as pain is a warning from the body that the joints are being damaged. Reducing the pain too much with drugs may encourage an overuse of the joints (e.g. by jogging).

Although osteoarthritis often accompanies ageing, many experts now believe that osteoarthritis is a disorder caused by a genetic susceptibility combined with injury to the joint. Other factors that may contribute towards the condition include:

- Being overweight. Excess weight puts stress on the joints, particularly the hips and knees. Weight bearing joints are typically the most affected
- Repeated overuse leading to cartilage damage
- Injury to the knee or hip. Scar tissue and muscle spasm lead to blocked blood (nutrient) flow to the joints and lymphatic drainage (waste) away from the joint tissues. Lack of nutrient flow and waste drainage negatively affects healing and lead to an accumulation of damaging waste compounds within the joint capsule
- Physical inactivity. This can be as harmful to the joints as overuse. A lack of exercise or varied movement can weaken the muscles that support the joints and decrease joint flexibility. Eventually, underused joints may become stiff, painful, dysfunctional, and prone to injury and osteoarthritis
- Being female. In general, arthritis occurs more frequently in women than men (although in the under-45 age group, the condition affects more men than women)

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Dietary changes

Improving the diet is often overlooked as an effective approach. Our diets have changed dramatically in recent decades, with an increasing reliance on processed foods and convenience meals, which contain far fewer of the essential micronutrients we all used to get from our food. People in the less developed areas of the world, who only eat natural, unrefined and unprocessed foods, tend to have far fewer chronic degenerative diseases like arthritis. The amount of water in our diets is also very important. Drink at least 4 pints of pure water a day (not soft drinks). This ensures there is enough fluid around the joints.

### *Recommended foods*

Eat a diet which is based on organic, fresh ingredients:

- Drink plenty of water and other fluids. Increase water to 2 litres per day.
  - Nettle tea: high mineral content
  - Green tea: contains polyphenols that fight oxidation in arthritic joints.
  - Rosehip tea: drink 2-3 cups per day
  - High in complex carbohydrates (fibre-rich whole grains, fruits, and vegetables). Good grains include millet, oats, rice and buckwheat
  - Good quality protein such as soy, fish, eggs or poultry
  - No more than 20% of calories in fat (with only 10% animal fats). Low-fat dairy products
  - Bananas, artichokes for FOS (fructooligosaccharide - a natural fruit sugar)
  - Fresh cherries, strawberries, blueberries, and other red-blue berries have antioxidant compounds that protect cartilage, tendons and joints. At least 10 fresh cherries and berries daily
  - Celery and celery seeds are a traditional food-based remedy that has been observed to help halt inflammatory flare-ups as they are natural diuretics, decreasing uric acid
  - Vegetables including kale, cabbage, parsley, green-leafy vegetables, okra, fresh vegetable juices
  - Foods high in bromelain (pineapple)
  - Foods high in vitamin C (red cabbage, kiwi fruit, acerola)
  - Ginger and Turmeric: inhibits pain-producing prostaglandins
- Garlic: acts as an antibiotic and anti-inflammatory. Add fennel, caraway seeds, alfalfa, garlic and fresh herbs to cooking

- Essential fatty acids from cold water fish such as tuna and salmon, and from good quality oils such as flax, walnut, olive, etc. Oils like walnut, flaxseed, and grape seed can actually decrease pain and swelling, so pour over salads, and vegetables
- Increase antioxidant containing foods i.e. sweet potatoes, apricots, carrots, mangoes, broccoli, avocado, onions
- Shiitake mushroom: boosts immunity. Add to soups, casseroles, stir-fries and salads regularly

#### ***What to avoid***

- Alcohol (especially beer), sugars, simple CHO's additives, saturated fats, margarine etc.
- Fizzy drinks: contain phosphates that deplete calcium levels
- Eliminate citrus fruit
- Reduce red meat intake: avoid organ meats such as liver, kidney, heart, brain, etc. Avoid game meat i.e. venison, pigeon, goose, etc.
- Refined/ processed foods
- All yeast – containing foods such as extracts (Bovril, Marmite, Vegemite), essence of chicken, brewers and baker's yeast, canned / powdered soups and stock cubes, consommé, gravies, sauces, etc.
- Solanacea vegetables i.e. tomatoes, white potatoes, aubergine, peppers
- Avoid eating foods high in purines: hawthorn berries, kidneys, liver, anchovies, caviar, sardines, shellfish, herring, mackerel, brewer's yeast

Too much salt interferes with the body's calcium metabolism and so can weaken the bones and joints. Try to keep your intake to a minimum. Most processed food contains a lot of salt.

The saturated fats found in meat and dairy products are known to exacerbate (worsen) OA, so these too should be restricted in your diet. Use vegetable oils like olive oil (see 'Fatty Acid Content of Various Oils' leaflet). Eating oily fish, such as mackerel and salmon, twice a week or more will also be beneficial, as this increases your intake of the healthier unsaturated fats, such as Omega 3 and also supplies some fat soluble vitamins.

#### **Food Intolerances**

Antibody reactions with food can cause complex 's that worsen your arthritis, making the joints even more painful. It may be worth identifying the foods (try an elimination diet) that give you problems and avoiding them until you are better. Homeopathy can help you overcome food sensitivities.

The foods most often involved include potato, bell pepper, tomato, and aubergine, grains such as wheat and corn and animal proteins, such as eggs and red meat. Tobacco can cause problems, too, in sensitive individuals. A useful guide can be found in the book 'Eat Right for Your Type' by Dr. Peter J. D' Adamo.

## **LIFESTYLE MODIFICATIONS**

### **Weight and exercise**

Excessive weight adds to the wear and tear on joints, so it is especially important for people with OA to try to keep their weight at recommended levels. Restricting your intake of saturated fats will help with this. Some gentle but regular exercise is also recommended, to compensate for the reduced level of physical activity your symptoms are likely to have caused. Swimming is usually best for people with joint problems as the water supports your weight and takes some of the strain off your joints. At the same time it provides aerobic exercise, which is good for your heart and circulation.

There are exercise systems that involve smooth, controlled movements to stretch and flex your muscles and keep your joints supple. You need to find a good, professional instructor, who will be able to advise you how to take part without increasing joint wear and tear or pulling any muscles. Discuss your condition first with the instructor.

### **Stress reduction**

The gentle exercises described above are also good at reducing stress levels. This is helpful to people with joint problems, as stress can make symptoms worse. Other effective ways of reducing stress include:

- Bathing - add 6 drops of the essential oils rosemary and chamomile to your bath water
- Use heat and cold - applying heat or cold to joints can provide temporary relief of pain and stiffness. Heat helps to relax sore or aching muscles and cold will numb them. Remember to place a towel or cloth between the skin and the source of heat or cold. A hot bath upon rising decreases morning stiffness
- Massage - using sesame oil or almond oil with added rosemary and chamomile essential oils
- Practice breathing, visualisation and meditation techniques.

Join a class or buy one of the many tapes or books available to learn how. These relaxation techniques all allow you to 'switch off' the stress of modern lifestyles. When the mind is relaxed and calm, the body can keep its built-in systems functioning at optimum levels to restore and heal itself naturally. For OA sufferers, relaxation techniques help to release muscular tension from around the joints, relieving pain and reducing wear and tear. Autogenic training and meditation can also produce mental and physical relaxation and may therefore be of help. Find a local practitioner to help you with these techniques.

## SUPPLEMENTS

Note: Please speak to Pauline with regard to recommended supplements.

*Glucosamine:* this is widely used in OA. Glucosamine is an amino sugar - to promote the formation and repair of cartilage.

*Collagen:* the universal structural protein found in all animals. It accounts for roughly a third of the body's total protein and is its major structural constituent. Collagen is present in connective tissue and in skeletal tissues such as cartilage and bone. It contains a high proportion of the amino acids involved in the synthesis of cartilage tissue. It may therefore help the body to heal the damaged cartilage and so reduce the symptoms of OA.

*Chondroitin sulphate:* is a larger molecule also found in cartilage. Some laboratory studies suggest that chondroitin sulfate may slow cartilage breakdown associated with osteoarthritis and even spur cartilage growth.

*Vitamin C:* an antioxidant and immune stimulating substance. Antioxidants help to 'mop up' free radicals in the body which can otherwise cause cell and tissue damage, like that caused by OA. Vitamin C can also help to strengthen the smallest blood vessels (the capillaries) which provide the essential blood supply to the joints. Improving the local blood supply to damaged joints should help the body's natural repair process by increasing the supply of oxygen and nutrients.

*Copper:* a mineral with a long history of use in the prevention and treatment of arthritis, often in the form of copper bracelets. Although copper can be absorbed through the skin, beneficial effects are only seen in people whose copper levels are normal, indicating that not enough is absorbed through the skin to correct a copper deficiency. If copper is to be taken internally, a zinc supplement should also be taken, as otherwise the extra copper will lead to zinc depletion.

*Boron:* Although arthritis mainly affects the joints, it is important to look after your bones too if you suffer from OA. Boron supplements can aid calcium metabolism to help build strong bones and this may have benefits in arthritis.

*Vitamin B5 (pantothenic acid):* Among the B-complex vitamins, vitamin B5 is the most important in osteoarthritis. Research published in The Lancet! in 1963 first showed that high levels of vitamin B5 had a protective effect against OA.

A number of oils, such as fish oil and Evening Primrose oil, can provide the healthy fatty acids, such as Omega 3, which are known to help in arthritis. Fish oil also provides the fat-soluble vitamins, such as B5 (see 'Fish Oil' leaflet)

For recommended suppliers and supplement advice please contact Pauline. Telephone: 01905 798567

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## HOMEOPATHY

Homeopathy has a remarkable record for treating and curing musculoskeletal conditions. Moreover treatment by a qualified homeopath will raise the general level of health and so prevent recurrences of osteoarthritis. Please phone Pauline to discuss this.

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