



Rheumatoid Arthritis

OVERVIEW

Arthritis is a general name, given to several conditions that affect the joints, causing pain and limiting mobility. Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is one of the most common of these. RA is an autoimmune inflammatory condition where the body's own defence mechanisms attack the membranes and tissues around the joints. RA is potentially very serious as it affects younger people and can spread rapidly to all of the joints in the body. Fortunately, there are a number of things you can do to prevent or heal the condition.

DEFINITION

Rheumatoid arthritis: a chronic inflammatory disease causing stiffness and loss of mobility through inflammation of the membranes and tissues around the joints.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Dietary changes

Improving the diet is often overlooked as an effective approach to treatment for arthritis (and many other common conditions). This is because 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.

Sufferers from RA will benefit from a diet rich in organically grown green leafy vegetables and coloured fruit and vegetables like plums, peaches, carrots, beetroot. These contain vitamins, minerals and substances called carotenoids which have beneficial antioxidant properties. Organic vegetables tend to contain more minerals and vitamins than 'factory-farmed' supermarket vegetables, according to recent research. You should try to eat these foods raw whenever possible, as a freshly made salad starter before every main meal, for example. Cooking, especially boiling in water, tends to reduce the vitamin and mineral content of foodstuffs.

The amount of water in our diets is also very important. People with arthritis should drink at least 4 pints of pure water a day (not soft drinks). This ensures there is enough fluid around the joints, essential for healthy, fully functioning joints.

Drinking tea and other caffeine-containing drinks can exacerbate arthritis by causing dehydration. Try to reduce or stop your intake of these drinks and replace them with pure water.

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 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 & stock cubes, consommé, gravies, sauces, etc.
- Solanacea vegetables: 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) both OA and RA, 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 help increase your intake of the healthier unsaturated fats, such as Omega 3 and also supplies some fat soluble vitamins.

SUPPLEMENTS

There are a number of supplements that have been shown to be helpful for sufferers of rheumatoid arthritis.

Glucosamine: this is widely used in both RA and OA. Glucosamine is an amino sugar, thought to promote the formation and repair of cartilage.

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.

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. Collagen appears to be more effective in RA than OA.

Antioxidants: Vitamin C is an antioxidant and immune stimulating substance which can help in RA. Antioxidants help the immune system and also help to 'mop up' free radicals in the body which can otherwise cause cell and tissue damage. Vitamin C, plus vitamin E, vitamin A (or beta-carotene, a safer form of vitamin A) and selenium work together to help protect arthritic joints from further damage due to immune system dysfunction. Vitamin C can also help to strengthen the smallest blood vessels (the capillaries) which provide the essential blood supply to the joints. This improves the supply of nutrients and oxygen to the affected tissues, to help the natural repair mechanisms of the body.

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 RA. Boron supplements can aid calcium metabolism to help build strong bones and this may have benefits in arthritis.

Fish oil: fish 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. Evening Primrose oil, Starflower oil and Flax oil are alternative sources of the beneficial fatty acids.

For recommended suppliers and supplement advice please contact Pauline. Telephone: 01905 798567
Email: pauline@paulinestarthomeopath.com

LIFESTYLE

Weight and exercise

Some gentle but regular exercise is 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, especially RA, 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
- 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. People with RA often find that their condition improves with the boost to their immune system that feelings of well-being and calm can provide. Autogenic training and meditation can also produce mental and physical relaxation and may therefore be helpful in OA. Find a local practitioner to help you with these techniques.

ALSO OF IMPORTANCE

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.

Leaky Gut Syndrome

You may need to address leaky gut syndrome. Inflammation in arthritis is often worsened by this.

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. Please phone Pauline to discuss this.

Telephone: 01905 798567

Email: pauline@paulinestarthomeopath.com