

Arthritis – Foods to Fight

By Allison Tannis, BSc., MSc.

It's morning and despite the scream of your alarm clock pushing you to get moving, the pain of stiff joints is slowing you down. As you try to persuade your aching knees to bend over the edge of the bed, you wonder if there is any thing you can do to fix this jointed problem. You are not alone. With more than 100 joints connecting the 206 bones of the body, and over one hundred types of arthritis, there are lots of ways and places to feel pain. Luckily, knowing the foods to eat, and the ones to avoid will help identify who is your enemy and whose on your side.

Gout

Perhaps the oldest known form of arthritis, gout generally occurs in the big toe but, can also occur in other joints such as the ankle. Gout is associated with an increased amount of uric acid. Uric acid is a by-product of protein metabolism in the body. Uric crystals accumulate in the joint, causing damage and inflammation. Over the long term, gout can even result in crystal formations that cause chronic inflammation.

Luckily, as we are able to determine a dietary source of aggravation in this type of arthritis, we can choose to avoid some types of food in order to feel better. Foods that are high in purines encourage uric acid formation and are best avoided. Such foods include mussels, yeast, smelt, sardines, sweetbreads, anchovies, grouse, veal, bacon, turkey, kidney, goose and pheasant.

There is a delicious way to fight gout. Cherries are known to be a great anti-inflammatory. Research has shown that cherries can help gout symptoms by reducing inflammatory mediators. (*Journal of Nutrition, June 2003*) So, reach for cherries for better joints. When they are not in season try an organic, all natural juice.

Osteoarthritis

Being the most common type of arthritis, many know that osteoarthritis (OA) is a disease characterized by the breakdown of cartilage in the joint. Cartilage is the elastic covering that protects the ends of bones. Unfortunately, we are not sure what causes OA. However, we are able to identify some foods that may be helpful in battling this disease. Most well known for its ability to help joints that suffer from osteoarthritis are the compounds glucosamine, chondroitin and SAME. However, these compounds are not readily available in large amounts in foods and are generally taken in supplement form to be useful.

There is some hope that ginger is helpful in OA. The science is scarce, and contradictory; however, the promise that ginger may be helpful exists. Plus, ginger's ability to help with digestion and nausea makes it a good part of any diet. (*Arthritis & Rheumatology, November 2001*), (*Osteoarthritis Cartilage, January 2000*)

Avocado and soy oils may also hold some promise in the battle against OA. However, this research is also limited. (*Clinical Rheumatology, October 2003*) Yet, avocados and soy are foods that are part of any healthy diet, as avocado is a fruit offering a source of good fats. And, soy is a great source of protein that is low in bad fat, may lower cholesterol levels and, is high in phytoestrogens thought to be beneficial in the treatment of PMS and menopause.

Rheumatoid Arthritis

Perhaps the most concerning of all forms of arthritis, rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is caused by the body's own immune system attacking itself. Affecting over 300,000 Canadians, RA is an enormous health concern. However, there is evidence that RA is less severe in the southern

Mediterranean where they consume greater amounts of fruits, vegetables, olive oil and fish than in many other countries. Despite the lack of large, long term studies on the effect of diet on RA, there is reason to eat a diet mimicking that of the Mediterranean as this diet is also known to be associated with low risks of heart disease - Canada's biggest killer.

Fruits and vegetables are full of anti-oxidants. Anti-oxidants are small compounds that act like warriors in the body. They seek out and neutralize damaging molecules that can cause inflammation. And, a recent study noted that lower intakes of fruits, vegetables and vitamin C is associated with an increased risk of developing inflammatory arthritis. (*Proceedings of the Nutrition Society, February 2004*)

A diet high in olive oil and fish is a diet low in saturated and trans fats, yet high in polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFAs). PUFAs include the omega-3 fatty acids, which are well known for their ability to reduce damaging inflammation. Therefore, eating two servings of fish each week, or supplementing with omega 3 fatty acids are thought to be beneficial in the fight against arthritis.

There is some who theorize that it is beneficial for RA to cut out foods such as red wine and chocolate from the diet. However, there is no direct link between chocolate or red wine consumption and this disease.

The Joint Menu

Obesity is a likely cause of arthritis, particularly of osteoarthritis of the lower joints. Excessive weight bearing by joints can cause damage. A jolly joint menu is a diet that encourages a healthy weight. It also includes 5 to 10 servings of fruits and vegetables, at least 2 servings of fish per week, and a healthy serving of cherries. Avoid processed foods, sugars and bad fat. Eat right, and you'll enjoy jolly joints, and healthy living!

Creamy garlic salad dressing with Omega 3s

Ingredients:

¼ cup water

1 medium sized crushed garlic clove

4 ounces soft tofu

¼ cup Herbal Select Essential 369 oil

3 tbsp lemon juice

2 tsp rice vinegar

1 tsp poppy seeds

1 tsp dried dill weed

salt or substitutes to taste

Directions: Combine all ingredients in a blender and mix until smooth. Pour over a colour salad and enjoy!

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