



The Best **FOOD CHOICES FOR** *Arthritis Sufferers*

Prevent Inflammation

Strengthen The Bones

Boost Immunity

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When people think of arthritis, they usually think of years of joint pain and taking strong medicines to deal with the pain. In fact, arthritis can be treated in many ways, including eating a diet that doesn't contain inflammatory foods and can actually relieve the symptoms without having to take potentially dangerous medications. In this guide, we will talk about ways that diet can influence arthritis symptoms and what foods you could eat to help control your arthritis symptoms.

What Is Arthritis?

Arthritis is a condition in which the joints are inflamed. You can have just one joint involved in arthritis or many joints afflicted with the condition. Arthritis can be unilateral and affect just one side of the body or bilateral, affecting joints on both side of the body.

Arthritis has many causes. Some types of arthritis are secondary to eating foods that allow crystals to develop in the joints, resulting in joint pain, redness, and swelling of the joint.

Gouty arthritis is an example of this.



Arthritis can also be caused by wear and tear on the joints or overuse of the joints. This is usually how people get osteoarthritis, which affects both large and small joints. Some people get arthritis from autoimmune diseases in which antibodies are made by the immune system that attack joint tissues, resulting in joint inflammation, swelling, and chronic joint pain.

Typical symptoms of arthritis include pain in the joints, redness, and swelling near the inflamed joint, joint stiffness, and an inability to move the joint without experiencing pain. As mentioned, medications can be given to control these symptoms; however, there are dietary changes you can make that can also reduce inflammation and can relieve joint pain without having to take medications to control the symptoms.

Types Of Arthritis

There are literally dozens of diseases that have arthritis as one of the main symptoms of the disease. Some of the more common types of arthritis include the following:

- **Ankylosing Spondylitis (AS).** This is one of the types of arthritis that is an inflammatory arthritis. It usually affects the bones of the spine. In AS, there is inflammation of the ligaments and joints of the spine, resulting in stiffness of pain that begin in the base of the spine and work their way up to the upper areas of the spine. The arthritis can be so severe that there can be fusion of the vertebral bodies that make up the spine. It can affect the shoulders, hips, and knees, although the spine is the major area affected by AS. AS is a systemic disease, which means it can affect the organs of the body.



- **Degenerative Joint Disease.** Normally, there are cartilaginous discs between the vertebra, which are the bones that make up the spine. In degenerative joint disease, the discs that normally absorb the shock between the vertebral bodies begin to shrink and fail to keep the vertebral bodies from rubbing up against one another. Just about everyone has degenerative joint disease by the time they reach 60 years of age; however, not everyone will

experience pain in the back. When the discs degenerate completely, osteoarthritis sets up between the vertebral bodies.

- **Gouty Arthritis.** This is an inflammatory arthritis that is caused by elevated levels of uric acid in the bloodstream. Uric acid can develop into crystals that are shaped like needles and that settle in the joints. These crystals inflame the joints, resulting in gouty arthritis. The small bones of the feet are primarily affected, although larger joints can be affected as well. Gouty arthritis doesn't always have symptoms but eventually, the individual with uric acid in the joints will develop an attack of painful arthritis that comes on suddenly and goes away after about ten days later. About 4 percent of US adults have gout. Gouty arthritis can be hereditary and affects men much more commonly than women.
- **Infectious arthritis.** This is a type of arthritis that is also known as "septic arthritis." It is caused by an infection from bacteria in the joint but can also be secondary to an infection in another part of the body that inflames the joints as well. Diseases like German measles, Lyme disease, fifth disease, infectious hepatitis, and rheumatic fever have arthritic symptoms without the presence of actual bacteria in the joints themselves. Infectious arthritis is usually the result of a bacterial infection but can be caused by fungal infections or viral infections of the joint.
- **Inflammatory Arthritis.** This represents a variety of diseases that are caused by inflammation of the joint and surrounding tissues. Rheumatoid arthritis, ankylosing spondylitis, juvenile idiopathic arthritis, and psoriatic arthritis are examples of inflammatory arthritis conditions. Many of these arthritis conditions are secondary to an autoimmune disease, in which antibodies are

made that attack the tissues of the joint and connective tissues. Many autoimmune diseases are at least partially hereditary. The most common symptoms of this type of arthritis include swelling, pain, tenderness, and warmth of the joints along with joint stiffness most prevalent in the morning. These are systemic diseases that can also affect other body areas, including the kidneys, eyes, brain, skin, and blood.

- **Lupus Arthritis.** This is one of the autoimmune diseases that have joint symptoms. Antibodies are made against connective tissue and several areas of the body are affected, including the kidneys, blood, brain, skin, joints, and other organs of the body. There are several kinds of lupus, including cutaneous lupus erythematosus, systemic lupus erythematosus, neonatal lupus, and drug-induced lupus. Besides joint symptoms, lupus can result in other systemic symptoms, including light sensitivity, hair loss, kidney disease, tiredness, and fever.
- **Osteoarthritis.** This is the most common type of arthritis. It is also referred to as degenerative joint disease, wear and tear arthritis, or degenerative arthritis. It affects about 27 million adults in the US. It can affect any joint of the body but is more prevalent in the hips, neck, knees, lower back, and the tiny bones of the hands and feet. The occurrence of arthritis is caused by degeneration of the cartilage that normally covers the ends of the bone and allows for smooth motion of the joints. Common symptoms include joint pain, swelling, and stiffness of the joints.
- **Psoriatic arthritis.** About a third of all people with psoriasis as a skin disease also have arthritis of the joints. This is an inflammatory arthritis, caused by an autoimmune process. The body's immune system makes antibodies

against joints and connective tissue, resulting in pain, swelling, stiffness, and inflammation of the joints. Permanent joint damage can occur if the condition is not treated early on in the disease process. The diagnosis is made when there are both joint and skin symptoms, although it is possible to have only inflammation of the joints with no rash involved.

- **Rheumatoid Arthritis.** This is an autoimmune disease in which the immune system of the body attacks joint tissue as part of an autoimmune disease. Rather than attacking pathogens, the antibodies are directed at the joint tissue, resulting in inflammation that thickens the tissues inside the joints themselves. Common symptoms are pain, swelling, and deformity of the joints. The end result of untreated rheumatoid arthritis is degeneration of the joints and damage to the cartilage. The space between the bones shrinks and the joints may become unstable, painful, loose, or rigid. The joint damage is irreversible so that early treatment is needed to reduce the permanent damage to the joints. The most common joints affected with rheumatoid arthritis include the ankles, knees, elbows, wrists, and feet. This is a symmetrical arthritis, which means that joints of both sides of the body are affected.
- **Spinal Stenosis.** This is a type of arthritis that results in a narrowing of the bones that make up the spine. The bony tissue overgrows and the ligaments of the spine thicken so that they pinch the nerves located within the spine. There can be many different types of symptoms, including pain in the back, numbness or pain in the lower extremities, constipation, and incontinence of urine. The narrowing of the spine can occur in the spinal canal (the middle

of the spine), the space between the vertebral bodies, or the space where the nerves exit the spine to send signals to other parts of the body.

The Role Of Diet In Arthritis

There is little research on the effects of diet and the outcome of arthritis; however, most experts recommend that people with arthritis should eat a healthy diet that contains a balanced amount of nutrients. People with arthritis should be of a normal weight so that they don't put extra pressure on the joints.

According to the publication *Nutrition and Your Health: Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, in order to be healthy and to prevent disease, people need to follow these recommendations for healthy eating:



- Drinking alcohol in moderation
- Eating a diet that is low in simple sugars and moderate in complex carbohydrates
- Eating a diet that is low in saturated fats and cholesterol
- Eating a diet that contains fruits vegetables, and whole grain products
- Exercising on a regular basis in order to maintain a healthy weight
- Eating a wide variety of foods

People are encouraged to make their meals from scratch and to avoid foods that are processed as these foods contain elevated levels of saturated fats, simple sugars, and preservatives, which are not a part of a healthy diet. When you make

the food yourself, you are in charge of what you are putting in your mouth and the food is usually fresh and nutritious.



People with inflammatory arthritis are at risk for nutritional deficiencies. This is because inflammatory arthritis results in the production of cytokines, which increase inflammation, cause weight loss, and cachexia. Cytokines, such as tumor necrosis factor and interleukin-1 are released whenever there is chronic inflammation so that the body's metabolic rate increases and proteins within the body are broken down.

The long-term medications a person takes for arthritis can also affect nutrition. For example, inflammatory arthritis patients often take methotrexate, which can lead to folate deficiency. Other arthritis medications can cause peptic ulcer disease or gastritis of the stomach, which decreases appetite and can cause malnutrition.

It is not uncommon for those with inflammatory arthritis to have deficiencies in folate, vitamin E, Vitamin B12, vitamin D, vitamin C, selenium, zinc, and magnesium. Because it is not always possible to get these in the diet, many arthritis patients take vitamin and mineral supplements that make up for the nutrients not gotten through the food.

Those nutrients that are also antioxidants (like vitamin E and selenium) act as scavengers for oxygen free radicals that damage the linings of the joint. This results in a decrease in pain and swelling of the affected joints. Calcium and vitamin D supplementation is also part of the recommendations for arthritis patients so that the chances of getting osteoporosis are decreased. Many people with inflammatory arthritis have to take steroids, which can lead to leaching of the minerals from the bone.

Anti-Inflammatory Diet

The exact foods that go into an anti-inflammatory diet have not been established and yet researchers have found that there are foods you can eat that will decrease the inflammation seen in inflammatory arthritis. Foods found in an anti-inflammatory diet are similar to what is seen in the Mediterranean diet, which has a large amount of vegetables, fish, and olive oil in the diet. The Zone diet is also an example of an anti-inflammation diet.



The actual foods in an anti-inflammatory diet differ depending on whom you ask but in general, the recommendations are these:

- Eat low amounts of trans fats and saturated fats.
- Eat a lot of fruits and vegetables.
- Eat plenty of foods that are high in omega 3 fatty acids, such as fish and walnuts.
- Decrease the intake of white rice and pasta, which are high in refined carbohydrates.

- Choose whole grains, such as wheat bread and brown rice.
- Choose spices that have anti-inflammatory properties, such as curry and ginger.
- Avoid highly processed or refined foods and instead make food from scratch.
- Select lean meat sources, such as poultry, avoiding red meat and dairy products that are high in fat.

Eating an anti-inflammatory diet doesn't necessarily mean you'll lose weight but most people do lose some weight on this type of diet. This takes the pressure off the joints and reduces the pain and inflammation of arthritis.

Best Foods

While there isn't any dietary cure for arthritis, there are some foods that have been found to be beneficial against inflammation, increase the effectiveness of the immune system, and make bones stronger. The following foods are considered good to take in if you have arthritis:

- **Fish.** Fish are high in omega 3 fatty acids, which are anti-inflammatory. You should eat at least two servings of fish per week, such as herring, mackerel, tuna, and salmon. Fish is especially good for rheumatoid arthritis.
- **Oils.** Certain oils, such as extra virgin olive oil are beneficial because they contain healthy fats and nutrients such as oleocanthal. Oleocanthal provides for decreases in inflammation, similar to that found in non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications. You can also choose avocado oil or safflower oil that lower cholesterol. Oils are good for osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis.
- **Soy products.** Soy products such as edamame and tofu are high in omega 3 fatty acids, fiber, and protein. Soy products are excellent food to eat if you have rheumatoid arthritis.
- **Cherries.** Cherries are especially good for gouty arthritis. They are high in anthocyanins, which are anti-inflammatory



by nature. You can find anthocyanins in raspberries, strawberries, blackberries, and blueberries.

- **Broccoli.** Broccoli is good for osteoarthritis because it is high in vitamin C, vitamin K, and sulforaphane, which has found to be a good choice in the prevention and progression of osteoarthritis. Broccoli is high in calcium, which fights osteoporosis.
- **Dairy products.** Dairy products that are low in fat can help fight osteoarthritis and osteoporosis. They are high in vitamin D and calcium, which increase the strength of the bones. Dairy products enhance the immune system. If you don't like dairy, you can get your calcium and vitamin D by eating leafy green vegetables.
- **Green tea.** Green tea is high in polyphenols, which are antioxidants that have been shown to decrease inflammation and to slow the progression of cartilage breakdown. Green tea is also high in EGCG (epigallocatechin-3-gallate), which is effective against those substances that damage the joints in rheumatoid arthritis.
- **Citrus fruits.** These are good for arthritis because they are high in vitamin C, which prevents inflammation in patients with osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis. Good citrus fruits include lemons, oranges, limes, and grapefruits.



- **Beans.** Beans are high in fiber, which naturally decreases the level of C-reactive protein—a protein that results in inflammation. Beans are also high in minerals and folic acid, which help stimulate the immune system and fight rheumatoid arthritis. Red beans, such as pinto beans and kidney beans, are the best choices for arthritis.
- **Whole grains.** Whole grains also decrease the levels of C-reactive protein in the bloodstream. C-reactive protein helps reduce the amount of inflammation found in conditions like diabetes, heart disease, and rheumatoid arthritis. Try getting whole grains by eating whole grain cereal, brown rice, and oatmeal, which are high in rheumatoid arthritis.
- **Garlic.** Garlic, leeks, and onions are part of the allium family, which decreases symptoms in osteoarthritis. Scientists believe that diallyl disulphine in garlic will decrease the amount of enzymes in the joint that damage cartilage. Garlic is especially good for osteoarthritis.
- **Nuts.** Nuts have high levels of alpha linolenic acid (ALA), minerals, vitamin E, fiber, and protein. The best nuts to choose are pistachios, almonds, pine nuts, and almonds. Nuts help you lose weight, which benefits the joints in all types of arthritis.



Foods To Avoid

There are some foods that actually increase inflammation. Foods you need to avoid if you have arthritis include the following:

- **Trans fats.** Trans fats damage the lining of the blood vessels, inducing inflammation. Because trans fats are mainly manmade, we don't break them down very easily so the end result is inflammation of the joints.
- **White bread and pasta.** These break down into simple sugars that lead to inflammation. Inflammatory markers are higher in those people who eat processed wheat foods, so there is more joint pain and inflammation in arthritic patients.
- **Saturated fats.** Saturated fats are high in arachidonic acid that causes inflammation. Instead of saturated fats, you need to eat more unsaturated fats, which don't lead to inflammation. Saturated fats are found in red meats as well as in high-fat dairy products.
- **Omega 6 fatty acids.** These can be found in some types of seeds. If you are going to eat fatty foods, make sure that the balance is toward omega 3 fatty acids and lower in omega 6 fatty acids.
- **MSG.** Foods that are preserved in monosodium glutamate (MSG) can increase the level of inflammation in the body. This is why it is better to



make your own food from scratch so you can avoid foods that might be preserved with MSG.

- **Gluten.** Even if you don't have celiac disease, you should decrease the amount of gluten in your diet. Gluten isn't inflammatory in everyone but may be the cause of some of the inflammation you are experiencing.

The Importance Of Weight Management

Weight management is important for everyone who suffers from arthritis. Extra weight on the joints can stress the joints and can lead to increased pain. The best way to know if you are overweight and need to lose weight is to find out your body mass index.

Your body mass index or BMI is a formula that divides your weight in pounds by your height in inches squared, and multiplying that by 703. If this number is 25 or greater, you are overweight. If the number is 30 or greater, you are considered obese.

Losing Weight

There are no magic tricks when it comes to losing weight, especially if you have arthritis. The best way to lose weight is to eat a well-balanced diet of anti-inflammatory foods that has no greater than 2000 calories per day.

If you really need to lose weight more quickly, you need to lower your caloric intake to about 1500 calories per day. At this level, you will lose up to a pound a week.

You can increase your weight loss by engaging in aerobic exercise on most days of the week. Aerobic exercise involves things like brisk walking, jogging, swimming, and cycling, among other activities that increase your heart rate and respiratory rate. Aerobic exercise is heart healthy and will increase the amount of weight you lose. Try exercising at least 150 minutes every week. It doesn't have to be done all at once but can be broken down into 30-minute segments.

Final Thoughts

While arthritis can be managed with a wide variety of medications, you can control the inflammation in your joints by eating a diet that is high in anti-inflammatory foods and is low in food substances that increase inflammation.

Keeping your weight within a normal range through diet and exercise will also decrease the amount of pain and stress on the joints.