Nutrition and Diet for Osteoarthritis Patients

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Diet for Osteoarthritis: The Ingredients and Kitchen Habits That Can Save Your Joints

Osteoarthritis (OA) can be difficult to control, especially when your body isn't operating at full capacity. All the cells in all of your systems rely on a cocktail of nutrients, minerals and other compounds to perform their individual functions, and support other cells. In the end, your arthritis pain rests on your entire lifestyle, not just direct strain to your joints.

No food can reverse your OA or replace medications you take to control the problem. On the other hand, the things you take into your body — in any form — will certainly have impact on your system.

As research continues, more evidence suggests that your diet can play a remarkable role in how you experience, and overcome your OA symptoms.

The Joint Benefits of Eating Well

A diet that rests on processed and nutrient-sparse foods is a major threat to your joint health. While repetitive stress and injury can certainly leave you prone to OA, a weak diet can contribute to the development and progression of the condition more than you might imagine.

There are dozens of reasons to improve your diet, but a few specific benefits will stand out for anyone who suffers from joint damage and discomfort. A better diet will help to:

Control Weight

Whether or not you also have a disease associated with weight gain, like heart disease or diabetes, losing weight will help anyone with OA live longer and more comfortably. Even a modest amount of extra weight can be a burden, especially to the knees: carrying an extra 10 pounds will put 30 to 60 pounds of force on the knee with each step.

Other joints may also be at risk when you're overweight, like the joints in the hand, which means the effect of too much body weight might reach farther than simply the force on a specific joint.

Build Cartilage

Since it has no blood vessels or nerve supply, cartilage can be difficult to heal and build — but it's not impossible. In fact, providing your body with nutrients and antioxidants will deliver cartilage-boosting substances to the joints.

Vitamin A is one such helper, fighting free radicals that promote disease, while vitamin C is also necessary for cartilage development and cell growth in tendons and ligaments (two important structures for joint stability).

Reduce Inflammation

The pain and swelling in arthritic joints can be traced to inflammation, and inflammation can come from a variety of sources.

Not surprisingly, the food you eat (or don't eat) will weigh heavily on the extent of inflammation in your body, and most people don't realize just how much their menus are contributing to the discomfort. It's important to find an effective erosive osteoarthritis diet to help reduce and prevent inflammation. Refined foods are among the worst for inflammation, while foods rich in omega-3 fatty acids are exceptionally anti-inflammatory.

Your Kitchen Action Plan

The first step to OA nutrition is tracking your ingredients to make sure you're getting enough macronutrients (protein, carbohydrates and fats), as well as crucial vitamins and minerals.

Everyone's eating habits are a little different, and that's alright — you don't have to conform to a strict daily menu as long as you make an effort to improve your habits in a few areas. The key is smart additions, equally smart subtractions, and perhaps a better approach to preparation.

Next page: the kitchen action plan to help improve your diet for osteoarthritis.

Your Kitchen Action Plan

Stock the Crisper

Fruits and veggies are the absolute best sources of antioxidants and joint-boosting nutrients. Be sure you keep a variety on hand at all times, but pay extra attention to the vitamin C, A and K powerhouses.

Dark leafy greens, broccoli, carrots and sweet potatoes bring a lot to the table, but so do citrus fruits and apples. Some studies suggest that strawberries and onion can directly lower joint inflammation levels, too. Try to build more meals on a foundation of veggies, rather than simply serving them on the side.

Cut out Sauces

Trying to shed a few pounds? Start by simplifying your dishes.

Sauces, condiments, and other flavorful additions can really make a meal — but they can break your low-cal intentions just as easily. It's a good idea to eliminate all butter, oil, mayonnaise, and sugar-based sauces (which comprises most of the store-bought sauces out there).

If you can't swear off sauces completely, try supplementing with fresh herb pestos, a dash or two of chili sauce, or pungent spices — ginger and turmeric are especially good for beating inflammation.

Don't Shy Away From Good Fats

Fat is no longer the enemy it was once made out to be. However, certain types of fat are definitely better than others — both for your waistline and for your whole-body health.

Olive oil is one of the most helpful fats out there, largely due to the concentration of oleocanthal — a compound that helps to prevent inflammation. Pick strongly-flavored olive oils for higher levels of oleocanthal, and in order to save on calories, you'll want to use it in place of other fats (oils, butter, animal fat) rather than simply add more to your diet.

Lower the Heat

When certain foods are cooked at high temperatures, they release undesirable inflammatory compounds. Meat is the major culprit, and since it’s not unusual to grill or broil it, you might be taking in these advanced glycation end products (AGEs) on a regular basis without even realizing it.

You don’t have to adopt a raw food diet, but so try to retrain the flame when it comes to cooking methods: opt for gentle sautéing instead of pan searing, or slow roasting over broiling and grilling.

Supplement Wisely

Joint-friendly supplements can be a nice finishing touch to a well-constructed OA diet plan. Evidence suggests that supplementing with glucosamine sulfate and chondroitin sulfate can go far to restoring range of motion and preventing further degradation, since these two compounds are components of natural cartilage.

Since glucosamine and chondroitin stimulate your body to form new cartilage, they can be very helpful when there’s evidence that your joints have already lost a substantial amount of cushioning. Both supplements are considered quite safe and are generally very well-tolerated, but since studies have been limited, there’s no guarantee you’ll see remarkable results.

In any case, patience and persistence are crucial when you’re adjusting your diet and supplements for OA management. You might not see results for several weeks, so stick with your healthy changes — eventually, your body will thank you for fueling it properly.