

Foods that are bad for arthritis victims

Written by PHILIP S. CHUA, M.D., FACS, FPCS
Friday, 16 September 2011 12:35



RHEUMATOID Arthritis (RA), commonly known as arthritis, which causes the usual aches and pains in the various joints in the body, especially among the elderly, affects about 47.8 million people in the United States in 2005.

It is projected to rise to 67 million by 2030. RA is also found among those who are between the ages of 30 and 50, though more prevalent among those in the 60s and older.

RA is a chronic and progressive inflammatory disease involving connective tissues in the body, like joints, where swelling and thickening of the synovial membranes (sac containing the fluid that lubricates the joints) lead to irreversible damage to the joint capsules and the joint cartilage and loss of lubrication.

When this cushion is destroyed, the two opposing bones at the joint directly rub against each other and causes friction, pains and more swelling.

Like mechanical ball bearing joints in some motors, rust and lack of oil lubrication can damage them.

As years of round-the-clock inflammation takes its toll on the various joints, the bony deformities

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increase, and in severe cases, there can be severe stiffness and even “locking of the fused joints,” leading to frozen neck spine, shoulder, hips, knees, etc.

This condition ultimately causes great limitation in movements.

There are food items that are bad for arthritis.

When eaten, they aggravate the inflammation within the joints, increasing the pain and discomfort.

There are also foods that lessen the inflammation and pain.

Individuals vary in their responses, but in general, this rule applies.

RA sufferers know by their own experience which food items worsen the pains and which are soothing to their joints.

The pains of arthritis can vary from mild nagging aches to excruciating pains.

While we all consider arthritis as a part of natural aging, inevitable, and worsens with age, studies have shown that those whose diet mainly consisted of meat and other high cholesterol foods from childhood have the more severe arthritis, which worsens faster.

On the other hand, those who ate mainly fish, vegetables, whole grains, nuts and fruits, from childhood, had delayed onset of arthritis, and while it progressed with age, the speed with which it worsened was much slower.

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The deformities in the joints (fingers, wrists, knees, etc.) associated with arthritis was also less in this group of no-red-meat eaters.

Some medications, like corticosteroids, like prednisone, which reduces inflammation and therefore pain, can cause the body to excrete a lot of potassium, leading to hypokalemia (low blood potassium level).

Methotrexate, another drug for RA, can lead to Folic Acid deficiency.

Treatment for RA can cause osteoporosis, so it is vital that Vitamin D3, calcium, multivitamin/mineral supplements are a part of the regimen, besides watching the two side effects of the drugs on potassium and Folic Acid as stated above.

Food bad for arthritis

Red meat, milk products, processed with lots of chemical (preservatives, coloring, etc.), sugar, carbs and other sweets, soft drinks, shellfish, eggs, cheese, eggplants, tomatoes, safflower, sunflower, are among the food items that increase inflammation of the joints, causing pain, deformities, and restricted body movements.

Sugar and red meat (and other fatty foods) have been considered the greatest culprits in RA not only in the causation and development of arthritis itself but their adverse effects leading to its faster progressive worsening as sufferers get older.

Research has data that link some foods and inflammation.

Consuming a lot of saturated fats (steak, bacon, hot dogs and butter) produces chemicals in the body that leads to inflammation, swelling, and pain in the joints.

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Trigger foods are best avoided not only for pain relief but to minimize the potential severe deformities and restrictions the disease poses.

Food good for arthritis

No diet can cure RA, but some of the food items that inhibit or reduce inflammation are fish with its omega 3 oils, tumeric, ginger, extra virgin olive oil, sweet peppers, citrus fruits, green leafy vegetables, broccoli, cauliflower, Brazil nuts, apples, kale, leeks, onions, tart cherries, green tea.

They are antioxidants, anti-inflammatory and immune system boosters.

Eating them (in LIEU of red meats and other fatty foods, sugars, as listed above) minimize the swelling and lead to improvement in the lubrication of the joint.

The Mediterranean Diet

The Mediterranean Diet we often mention in this column shows great promise for those with rheumatoid arthritis.

It is healthy and quite tasty also.

This diet consists mainly of fresh fish (instead of red meat), a lot of vegetables and fruits, non-saturated fats, like canola and extra virgin olive oil) whole grains, nuts, fruits, herbs and spices (in place of butter and salt).

The 3-fold benefit of eating fish like tuna, sardines, salmon, in the Mediterranean Diet regimen, includes (1) anti-inflammatory action, (2) cardiovascular protection and (3) its weight control

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effect, leading to less poundage and less pressure on the joints.

Fish oil in gelpcaps have also been found to confer the advantages cited above.

“The best data we have is that a diet high in omega-3 fatty acids and antioxidants is good for RA,” says Nathan Wei, M.D., clinical director of the Arthritis and Osteoporosis Center of Maryland, published on WebMD.

“The Mediterranean Diet is high in both, and it’s also good for people who want to be careful about weight gain. Of course, it’s also important to couple the diet with exercise.”

Herbal, supplements, others

Countless herbals, food supplements, “laser guns,” magnets and other items marketed aggressively as remedies for arthritis.

These have not been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) or other national monitoring/licensing agencies, and have no basis in science.

While some of the crude herbal substances have analgesic (pain killing) effect, their potential side effects on the internal organs are unknown.

And those companies that claim their product(s) can cure arthritis are only defrauding the consumers.

It is best to stay with FDA approved medications, all of which have gone through very rigid scientific scrutiny and quality control.

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Simply because one has arthritis does not mean he/she should be miserable.

The way to minimize the pains and potential debility from it is, to a significant extent, within our control.

The first thing to do is to listen to our body.

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