

Today's



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ARTHRITIS

Arthritis is one of the oldest diseases known to man. History records evidence of individuals suffering from joint pain and inflammation or "fire in the joints." Generations of different forms of relief have surfaced throughout the ages. Arthritis involves one or more joints in the body affecting the synovial or movable joints. Arthritis is really a general name for a number of diseases characterized by joint pain and inflammation. It is a debilitating condition that strikes old and young alike.

Symptoms of arthritis range from mild aching to severe pain and deformity. Inflammation is usually present along with the pain. Morning stiffness, swelling and tenderness are common. Arthritis may appear suddenly or come on gradually over an extended period of time depending on the type. Some types of arthritis may be inherited or the result of a viral infection. Diet is thought to be a primary factor in most cases.

The medical community has focused on treating symptoms of a disease. Physical therapy and joint replacements are also practiced in severe cases. Conventional treatment has involved the use of nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs that help with inflammation and pain but do nothing to heal. They may inhibit the body's own natural immune function while eliminating symptoms temporarily. There has been some evidence that long term use of anti-inflammatory medication may actually lead to further joint damage.¹ Medications may also have serious side-effects, like gastrointestinal, kidney and liver problems.

Many find relief with natural approaches to healing.

Synovial joints allow different types of motion. In a healthy joint, adjoining joints are covered with cartilage and surrounded with a fluid capsule made of fibrous tissue. Fluid is secreted by the synovial membrane lining the joint capsule. This allows for smooth movement of the joint. The synovial membrane is generally thin in a healthy joint. When changes take place due to a number of factors, arthritis may result.

There are a variety of types of arthritis. The three most common forms of arthritis are osteoarthritis in which the joints wear out due to injury or normal wear and tear, rheumatoid arthritis, a condition resulting from the immune system attacking the body tissue, and gout which is a painful inflammation due to excess uric acid in the blood.

Osteoarthritis

Osteoarthritis is the most prevalent degenerative joint disease and is often found in older individuals, more commonly women. It usually comes on slowly, over a period of time generally striking after the age of forty. It is characterized by pain and stiffness with inflammation and joint enlargement at the later stages. Joint movement may be accompanied by pain and a grating sensation.

Osteoarthritis occurs with a degeneration of the cartilage that surrounds the ends of the bones. It may be precipitated by an injury or defect. It is often thought of as a part of the normal wear and tear of aging leaving the surface uneven. The cartilage breaks down leaving rough edges, causing friction. The joint may become deformed with pain and stiffness. The

most common joints affected are the weight bearing including the hips, knees and spine. By the age of 80 almost 90 percent of individuals will suffer from some degree of osteoarthritis.

Rheumatoid arthritis

Rheumatoid arthritis is a more severe chronic form of arthritis and symptoms are generally more localized. Women are more prone to this type of arthritis as well. Young children and young adults can also suffer from this condition. It most often affects the large joints of the hands, wrists, elbows, knees and feet. In some cases there can be serious destruction of joints and other tissues of the body including the skin, lymph nodes, lungs, heart, liver and kidneys. Most individuals with this condition suffer from mild to moderate pain and swelling involving the knuckles and small joints of the hands. Swollen areas may feel hot to the touch. Rheumatoid arthritis is an autoimmune disease as the immune system may attack its own tissue.

Gout

Gout is a condition in which uric acid, a chemical waste product, accumulates and crystallizes in the joints causing pain and inflammation. The joint most often affected is the joint of the big toe. There can be extreme pain coming on suddenly. Gout can commonly cause pain with periods of remission. Gout is often associated with a rich diet and alcohol consumption. Overweight individuals are more commonly affected. Men are more often affected than women.

Nutritional Support

Jean Carper, in her book *Food: Your Miracle Medicine*, suggests ten foods that aggravate arthritis which include corn, wheat, bacon/pork, oranges, milk, oats, rye, eggs, beef and coffee.² Some have found beneficial results from a vegetarian diet. In one study 90 percent of the patients improved when

changing to a vegetarian diet. They had less pain, greater strength, less joint swelling and relief from morning stiffness.³

- Avoid nightshade foods such as potatoes, tomatoes, peppers, eggplant and milk products.
- Avoid red meat which can cause uric acid buildup leading to joint inflammation. Stay away from bacon, hot dogs, and cold cuts containing chemicals and preservatives.
- Increase intake of carrots, celery, cabbage, garlic, onions and green leafy vegetables and tomato juice.
- Avoid alcohol, coffee, refined sugars, dairy and refined foods.
- Eat foods high in fiber. Increase fiber intake.
- Eat foods rich in omega-3 fatty acids such as herring, salmon, tuna and sardines.

Nutritional Supplements and Herbal Helps

SELENIUM: This is an antioxidant that may be deficient in rheumatoid arthritis patients.

VITAMIN E: Vitamin E is an antioxidant that works with selenium.

ZINC: Zinc is a powerful antioxidant and is generally deficient in those suffering from rheumatoid arthritis.

VITAMIN C: This is an antioxidant and many who suffer from rheumatoid arthritis are deficient.

PANTOTHENIC ACID: A deficiency may cause a failure in the growth of cartilage and produce arthritis like symptoms.

CALCIUM AND MAGNESIUM: These can help to prevent bone loss.

METHIONINE: This is an essential amino acid that is important to the structure of cartilage and can act as a natural anti-inflammatory.

GLUCOSAMINE: Glucosamine is a compound naturally found in the joints of the body. It is formed in the body from glucose. Glucosamine is important as a precursor and stimulant of the construction of proteoglycan synthesis which is the basis of cartilage. It

is important for the synthesis of substances which make up tendons, ligaments, cartilage, respiratory system and the mucous membranes of the digestive and respiratory tracts.

The normal aging process causes a decline in the amount of glucosamine production. As it is involved in the natural cushioning in the joints, this can lead to damage and pain. When the natural cushion is gone, bone and cartilage may rest against each other causing deterioration. This can occur in the joints as well as the spinal column.

Glucosamine sulfate is a treatment that has proven effective for osteoarthritis. In fact, some have found it to work better than conventional therapies because it does more than just mask the pain but actually aids in rebuilding and stimulating joint repair. It also helps to prevent joint destruction.

Glucosamine sulfate helps heal, relieve pain, reduce inflammation, and improve the joint damage without the side effects often associated with drug therapy.

Studies have found that glucosamine metabolism is altered when osteoarthritis is present. Glucosamine supplements have been found to be effective in treating this condition. Trials have found substantial improvement in individuals treated with glucosamine.⁴

There has been little risk if any involved with the use of glucosamine in treating osteoarthritis. It appears that glucosamine is very safe without any known precautions or risks. One study found that glucosamine sulfate may help stimulate the defense mechanisms in the stomach lining.⁵ Pain and anti-inflammatory medications often cause stomach problems.

Glucosamine sulfate has been shown to be an important part of treating osteoarthritis. Results showed significant improvement in swelling, pain, and degeneration of joints. Not only is it important for reducing the symptoms involved with osteoarthritis, but it also has been found to actually reverse the degenerative process and induce healing. Glucosamine should be considered as a form of treatment for osteoarthritis.

FEVERFEW: Feverfew has long been used as a treat-

ment for arthritis. Feverfew may be a useful treatment in cases of rheumatoid arthritis because of its ability to inhibit the formation of inflammation promoting compounds such as prostaglandins and leukotrienes. It seems to have similar properties to nonsteroidal, anti-inflammatory agents (NSAIDs), which include aspirin but may actually be more effective with less potential complications. Research has documented these findings.⁶

Inflammatory compounds released by white blood cells and platelets contribute greatly to the inflammation and cellular damage found in rheumatoid arthritis. The inhibition of the release of inflammatory particles by feverfew is much greater than that achieved by NSAIDs like aspirin. This coupled with many of feverfew's other effects indicate that feverfew could greatly reduce inflammation in rheumatoid arthritis.⁷

A study undertaken to test the use of feverfew in cases of rheumatoid arthritis found no benefit from its use. Research was conducted by M. Patrick, S. Heptinstall and M. Doherty at the Rheumatology Unit, City Hospital, Nottingham. Forty one female patients were given wither dried feverfew in capsule form (70-86 mg) or a placebo daily for six weeks. No major differences were seen by either group after the six week period.⁸ It should be noted that some disagree with the studies findings. The participants continued to take anti-inflammatory drugs along with the feverfew, and the amount of parthenolides in the dried leaves was not determined. More studies are needed to determine the benefits of feverfew in treating rheumatoid arthritis.

GINGER: Ginger is well known for its medicinal properties. It is used for numerous ailments including arthritis. It contains antioxidant properties known to be beneficial for individuals suffering from rheumatoid arthritis. Research has found remarkable results from the use of ginger in treating this condition.

One study involved seven patients with rheumatoid arthritis who had tried numerous conventional drugs providing only temporary or partial relief. All of the patients reported significant improvement, pain

relief, reduction in swelling and improved mobility, from the ginger therapy.⁹ Other studies have found similar results with 75 to 100 percent of the patients having relief and improvement from ginger supplementation.

TURMERIC: The yellow pigment of the turmeric (curcumin) is a powerful anti-inflammatory. Turmeric is found in curry powder and mustard preparations. Studies have found that turmeric is a stronger antioxidant than vitamin C and vitamin E.¹⁰ It may help by improving the body's own antioxidant and anti-inflammatory capabilities. Studies have found beneficial results when supplementing with turmeric.

CAT'S CLAW: The Peruvians have recognized the anti-inflammatory capabilities of cat's claw for hundreds of years. They have used it to treat rheumatism, arthritis and other inflammatory joint conditions.

Clinical research has found that cat's claw does indeed have the ability to reduce inflammation. When different constituents of cat's claw were tested separately, they did not produce the same anti-inflammatory result. But when tested as a whole, the anti-inflammatory action was present.¹¹ It was recognized that the combination of ingredients work together to produce the specific action. This is certainly in line with the advice of many herbalists that it is important to use the whole herb because of its synergistic functions.

Finding natural anti-inflammatories can help many individuals without the side effects often associated with prescription medications. These drugs can cause many associated problems which may lead to serious disorders.

YUCCA: Research done on the yucca plant has found it to contain non-toxic steroid saponins which are similar to cortisone in their activity. These properties may help with arthritis and rheumatism.¹² Yucca contains saponins that improve the body's ability to produce a natural cortisone to help with inflammation, healing and pain. Fortunately, it does not cause some of the serious side-effects which are associated with long term use of cortisone type drugs.

IN THE NEWS

Endnotes

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RECIPES

Alcohol Consumption

Linked to Breast Cancer

Researchers at the Harvard School of Public Health analyzed five surveys involving 322,647 women from all around the world to assess a connection between breast cancer risk and alcohol consumption. The results found a definite link between drinking alcoholic beverages and an increased risk of developing breast cancer. An average of one drink per day increased the risk by 9% while five drinks per day increased the risk up to 41%. The type of alcohol consumed did not seem to affect the results.

More research is necessary to determine the reason for the connection. Alcohol may inhibit the body's immune function to protect against cancer. Reducing alcohol consumption seems sensible while waiting for more information.

Walking to Live Longer

Intense exercise has often been considered the only way to stay fit and healthy. But research has found that taking a brisk walk only six times per month can reduce the risk of death by 44%. Twins were used in the study to eliminate other factors such as heredity on longevity. Approximately 16,000 twins both male and female in Finland were followed for an average of 19 years.

Dr. Urhol M. Kujala of the University of Helsinki lead the study which was published in *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, February, 1998. The results are encouraging as even those who exercised occasionally, less than six times per month, reduced their risk of death by 30%. Even those who inherit a tendency for certain diseases can benefit from moderate exercise. The bottom line is that physical exercise can increase life span.

BOOK REVIEW

Bean and Spinach Stew

1 t. butter
 4 cloves garlic, minced
 8 cups chicken stock
 3 leeks, sliced
 2 carrots, diced
 2 stalks celery, diced
 2 tomatoes, seeded and diced
 2 cups cooked white beans
 10 red potatoes, cut in half
 1 cup fresh corn kernels
 1/2 pound spinach, chopped
 season to taste

Melt butter and add leeks and garlic in a large saucepan. Sauté for five minutes. Add chicken stock and then remaining ingredients except spinach. Cook for about 30 minutes or until potatoes and carrots are tender. Add spinach and seasonings. Cook for another ten minutes and serve.

Sesame Bread Sticks

2 cups sifted whole wheat flour
 1 T. honey
 1/2 t. salt
 3. T. cold pressed oil
 1/2 t. cinnamon

FPO PUT COVER HERE

3/4 cup cold water
 sesame seeds

Add all ingredients together leaving sesame seeds aside and stir well. Knead for five minutes. Roll a one inch ball into a pencil width strip. Roll in sesame seeds and place on greased cookie sheet. Bake for 30 minutes at 350 degrees.

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