

Arthritis – An ouch in the joint

If you suffer from osteoarthritis, then you'll know all about the ways it slows you down, and gives you a right royal pain. But what can you do about it? The common treatment is non-steroidal anti-inflammatories (NSAIDs), but these do not help your digestive processes at all. What else is out there?

Osteoarthritis is a degenerative and inflammatory condition, which can be hereditary, but mostly it comes from overuse, such as in jogging or repetitive work. Obesity and hypertension can also become factors too.

There are lots of things you can eat that will help, though it is best if you make sure that you don't have any food sensitivities or allergies (see last time's article about these). Cold water fish, such as cod, tuna, salmon and mackerel have omega 3 oils which reduce inflammation, and over time will reduce pain. If you like these, you should have them three times a week. If you don't like fish, then good quality flaxseed oil or cold pressed linseed oil also have the precious omega 3s. Fresh walnuts do too.

Some authorities say to avoid the nightshade foods, which are potatoes, tomatoes, eggplants, chillis and capsicums. You need to see if they affect you, so keep a note of your pain levels, then avoid them for at least a week, then reintroduce one. This is called challenging. If you have no ill effects, introduce another, but keep track of your pain levels. By being very observant, you can determine your sensitivity to these foods without the need for tests.

Avoid refined and processed foods, particularly refined sugar. If you're someone that has 1-2 teaspoons of sugar in every cup of tea or coffee, then you're not only putting on weight, but you're adding to your inflammation levels and the Ouch! factor. But artificial sweeteners aren't the answer either. The best idea is to change over to honey, which is a wholefood, and cut down so that half to one teaspoon of honey is enough to give you a nice tasting cuppa. There's also a herbal sweetener called stevia, which is completely safe, but a bit of an acquired taste, and another sweetener called xylitol, which is not as healthy, but acceptable in small amounts.

There are lots of herbs that are anti-inflammatory too, and a visit to a herbalist is a good start, as many have side effects for some people and should be prescribed. However, one common herb that is usually safe is ginger. If you use it in cooking, it will help. Turmeric and cinnamon also have good effects. Enjoy them in tasty meals. Celery is also good, and you can buy celery and juniper tablets which can take away some of that pain.

There are lots of good supplements out there too, which have been shown to reduce pain and inflammation in various ways. Self-medication is possible, but isn't the best course of action, as supplements can interfere with other medications, or be contraindicated in some conditions. But don't give up. Natural help for that Ouch! is definitely possible.

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[Advice in these columns is of a general nature only, and not to be taken as specific treatment.]