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Helping you live a longer, healthier life



LongLifeClub BLOG

• Dave Bunnell

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Healing Arts

Dealing with Arthritis Pain with Diet and Natural Therapies

As baby boomers begin reaching the age of retirement, the number of Americans developing arthritis-type disorders is expected to soar.

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Joint pain, known as arthritis, comes in many forms. The most common type is osteoarthritis, known as "wear and tear arthritis." The joints mainly affected by osteoarthritis are the finger, knee, and hip joints.

A more severe form of arthritis is rheumatoid arthritis, which is inflammatory and results in hot swollen joints. It is an autoimmune disorder that causes the body's immune system to attack the joints. I suspect that infections are common triggers for this attack.

The American College of Rheumatology has defined the following criteria for Rheumatoid Arthritis:

1. Morning stiffness of over 1 hour
2. Arthritis and soft-tissue swelling in over 3 of 14 joints or joint groups
3. Arthritis of hand joints
4. Symmetric arthritis
5. Subcutaneous nodules
6. Rheumatoid factor at a level above the 95th percentile
7. Radiological changes suggestive of joint erosion

At least four of these criteria need to be met, although patients are sometimes treated despite not meeting these criteria. The childhood form of this disease is called Juvenile Rheumatoid Arthritis.



Dr. Jacob Teitelbaum, M.D., is one of the world's foremost authorities on pain using natural remedies.

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In addition to using long-term antibiotic therapy with minocycline in rheumatoid arthritis, it is worth considering dietary changes as well. Diet can play a major role in inflammatory arthritis. A recent study tested the role of diet in 60 patients with rheumatoid arthritis. 30 patients were given a standard American diet and the other 30 an anti-inflammatory diet low in meat and high in fish oil-with supplements given to supply approximately 2 g of omega 3 fish oils daily-for eight months.

The patients on an anti-inflammatory diet had a 28 percent decrease in the number of tender joints. In addition, decreasing inflammation by giving borage seed oil (supplying 1.4 g of GLA-Gamma Linolenic Acid) decreased the swollen joint score by 41 percent in the active group vs. a 40 percent worsening in the placebo group. No patients had to withdraw because of side effects.

Many other nutrients, including pantothenic acid, vitamin A, vitamin C, vitamin E, boron, copper, zinc, and selenium have been found to be deficient and/or helpful in the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis.

High doses of fish oil (e.g. 1 to 2 Tbsp a day for at least 3 months) have been shown to be especially helpful in over six studies. As always, use fish oil that is mercury and lead free.

As baby boomers begin reaching the age of retirement, the number of Americans developing arthritis-type disorders is expected to soar. This increase will add to already significant arthritis rates. According to the Centers for Disease Control, one out of four American adults has been diagnosed with arthritis and another 17 percent may be suffering from it without having been diagnosed. In 2002, the percentage of those diagnosed with one or more forms of arthritis (including rheumatoid arthritis and gout), lupus, or fibromyalgia ranged from a low of 17.8 percent in Hawaii to a high of 35.8 percent in Alabama.

Thirty-six million workdays are lost each year because of osteoarthritis. A CDC (Center for Disease Control) arthritis expert stated that the number of cases of arthritis in America is huge compared to most other diseases. Fortunately, there are many natural and prescription therapies that can be effective.

Natural Therapies

I prefer using natural rather than prescription therapies for osteoarthritis. The most common prescription medications in use (NSAIDs like Motrin(r)) kill over 16,000 Americans yearly and do not slow, and may actually hasten, the progression of the arthritis. I recommend you begin with a natural treatment program that will decrease inflammation and help repair the joints.

This natural treatment program has four main components:

1. Repair
2. Prevent Damage
3. Restore Function
4. Rule Out and Treat Infections and Food Allergies

Repair

The joint cartilage can be repaired using a combination of glucosamine sulfate, Chondroitin(r), and MSM. It is also critical that you get comprehensive nutritional support, as discussed earlier, to promote wound healing.

Glucosamine, a cartilage compound that has been shown to actually heal your joints, is as effective as NSAIDs (e.g. Motrin(r) and other anti-inflammatory drugs). In addition, a recent animal study showed that glucosamine and the anti-inflammatory drugs work synergistically. This means that when the two are taken together, it is much more effective than simply taking either one alone.

Using glucosamine can therefore allow you to stop the anti-inflammatory drugs, or at least lower the needed dose. This can improve the safety, effectiveness, and cost of treatment dramatically.

Because of this, for tissue repair I recommend Glucosamine Sulfate, 500 mg, 3 times per day. Also consider MSM, 1.5 to 3 grams a day for 2 to 5 months, and Chondroitin, although these last two are less important.

MSM supplies the Sulfur amino acids needed for healing in general. Although most of the research on MSM and arthritis has not been placebo-controlled, two studies were. One showed an 80 percent decrease in arthritis pain after 6 weeks using 1500 mg in the morning and 750 mg at lunchtime.

Another showed that Glucosamine and MSM are synergistic for reducing pain and swelling in arthritic joints. One hundred and eighteen patients with mild to moderate osteoarthritis were treated 3 times daily with either 500 mg of glucosamine, 500 mg of MSM, a combination of both, or placebo. After 12 weeks, the researchers found that the combination treatment had a faster effect on decreasing pain and inflammation compared to Glucosamine or MSM alone.

Glucosamine sulfate is a cartilage building compound that has been found to be helpful in arthritis in many studies. Although its exact mechanism of action is not yet fully understood, it is a major component of the cartilage that is damaged in arthritic joints. Glucosamine taken by mouth is incorporated in the molecules that make up this cartilage, likely contributing to the healing of arthritis. As you may have noted above, I recommend the sulfate form (as opposed to Glucosamine hydrochloride) because the sulfate can also help with wound/joint healing.

Unlike aspirin/NSAIDS that do not slow down destruction of joints in arthritis, Glucosamine has been shown to actually help stabilize, and often heal the joints, as shown on x-ray. Doses of less than 1000 mg a day do not affect symptoms, and the standard dose is 500 mg 3 times a day. It can also be taken as 1500 mg once a day. It can be taken with or without food, and had no more side effects than placebo.

Chondroitin sulfate is sometimes added to Glucosamine or taken by itself. Its benefits are modest because less than 10 percent of it is absorbed, as opposed to 90 percent for Glucosamine sulfate. Because of this, I rarely use Chondroitin (r). On the other hand, 1200 mg a day can be helpful in slowing down arthritis and is worth trying if you do not get adequate relief with the other treatments. It can be taken all at once or 400 mg 3 times a day with equal effectiveness.

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Healing Arts**Dealing with Arthritis Pain with Diet and Natural Therapies**

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Overall nutritional support is also critical. For example, low concentrations and low intake of vitamin D seems to be associated with an increased risk of progression of osteoarthritis of the knee.

In addition, SAM-e can be helpful. This nutrient is produced from methionine (an amino acid) in combination with multiple nutrients, including B vitamins, folate, and inositol. It was initially tested and found to be effective in treating depression. Researchers also noted that it improved patients' arthritis as effectively as anti-inflammatory medications (NSAIDs).

A number of studies were done including one that gave 600 mg a day for 2 weeks followed by 400 mg daily for 2 years. Pain and stiffness decreased within one week and the improvement continued throughout the two-year trial. A study that reviewed seven other studies was inconclusive.

A major problem with SAM-e products is that they are not stable and break down easily, with many products not really delivering what they claim. In addition, it is quite expensive. A better alternative is to take the nutrients your body needs to make SAM-e. Combining the nutrients found in the Energy Revitalization System vitamin powder and B complex (by Enzymatic Therapy) resulted in increased blood levels of SAM-e similar to those found in people taking 400 to 800 mg of SAM-e daily.

These are only a few of many examples of the importance of overall nutritional support in treating arthritis. Dozens of other important nutrients can help arthritis (e.g. niacin, pantothenic acid, B complex, vitamin C, vitamin E, boron, selenium, and zinc). As you can tell, it important to get optimal nutritional support. The vitamin powder makes this easy to do.

Prevent Damage

I recommend a mix of several natural remedies, many of which can be found in combination. The formulation that I like the most combines boswellia, willow bark, and cherry. These are combined in an excellent new product called End Pain (also by Enzymatic Therapy).

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Using these three together can powerfully decrease many kinds of pain while preventing damaging inflammation. Take 2 tablets 3 times a day until your pain subsides (approximately 2 to 6 weeks) and then you can often lower the dose to 1 tablet 2 to 3 times a day, or as needed.

Curcumin can also be a healthful anti-inflammatory but requires the addition of piperine from black pepper for the curcumin to be adequately absorbed. I do not generally recommend that you use these if you take any prescriptions, however, because piperine may potentially also increase the absorption of other medications, causing them to reach toxic levels. Fish oil, 1/2 to 1 Tbsp daily, also has strong anti-inflammatory properties.

Restore Function

Restore function with stretching, exercise, and heat. Exercise at least 20 minutes a day. Swimming, walking, and yoga are good choices. Use a heating pad or moist heat for up to 20 minutes at a time to give relief.

Diet, exercise, and lifestyle can be important in the treatment and prevention of osteoarthritis. For example, losing 11 pounds will reduce a woman's risk of developing arthritis of the knee by 50 percent over a 10 year period. Adding exercise may further decrease arthritis pain.

Rule Out and Treat Infections and Food Allergies

These can aggravate arthritis. New techniques that combine acupuncture and applied kinesiology can be a very powerful way to eliminate allergies and sensitivities. I recommend using a brilliant technique called NAET. It was developed by Dr. Devi Nambudripad (see NAET.com for more information).

For rheumatoid arthritis, I also use long-term antibiotics (Minocycline) because I feel this is an infectious disease in many cases, and research has shown antibiotics to be effective.

In addition to these four treatment areas, although it may seem silly, copper bracelets have actually been shown in a blinded crossover study to be helpful in relieving arthritis, and I have also seen patients get better using them .

Other Natural Therapies

As noted above, I recommend that you begin with the End Pain formula and glucosamine/MSM. You may also want to try this popular home remedy:

Purple Pectin for Pain. Purchase Certo(r) in the canning section of your local grocery. It is the thickening agent used to make jams and jellies. Certo contains pectin, a natural ingredient found in plants. Take 1 to 3 Tbsp of Certo in 8 ounces of grape juice 1 to 2 times a day (1 to 2 Tbsp a day is enough for most people, but you can try more). If it's going to help, you'll likely know in 7 to 14 days. As the pain disappears, the dose can be reduced to 1 tsp in grape juice once or twice a day as needed. Many people have found this simple, safe, and cheap treatment to be effective.

As you can see, arthritis can be treated very effectively and safely using natural therapies. You don't have to choose between being in pain or taking dangerous medications any more!

Dr. Teitelbaum's website contains more great information about natural therapies and pain relief. Check it out at VITALITY101.com.

—*Dr. Jacob Teitelbaum*

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