



October Education: Your Bones & Joints

Don't Stay Put, Step Ahead with Strength

A joint is the connection between two bones. Joints and their surrounding structures allow you to bend your elbows and knees, wiggle your hips, bend your back, turn your head, and wave your fingers to say bye-bye.

Smooth tissue called cartilage and synovium and a lubricant called synovial fluid cushion the joints so bones do not rub together. But increasing age, injury, or carrying too much weight can wear and tear your cartilage. This can lead to a reaction that can damage your joints and lead to arthritis.

The best way to care for your joints is to keep them and your muscles, ligaments, and bones strong and stable. Here are some tips for good joint health.

Watch Your Weight for Healthy Bones & Joints

Keeping your weight within a healthy range is the best thing you can do for your joints. Weight-bearing joints, such as your knees, hips, and back, have to support some, if not all, of your body weight. That's why so many overweight people have problems with these areas of the body.

The higher the number on your bathroom scale, the more wear and tear you put on your joints. Losing weight reduces pressure on your knees, hips, and back and helps prevent joint injury. Research has shown that with every pound gained, a person puts four times more stress on the knees.

Exercise

Exercise can help you lose extra pounds and maintain a healthy weight. Some research suggests that aerobic exercise – activities that get your heart rate up – can reduce joint swelling. If your joints bother you, opt for exercises that won't give your joints a pounding. Instead of step aerobics, try low-impact exercises such as swimming or bicycling. Another healthy idea: Don't sit still! Couch potatoes, computer addicts, and all who remain glued to a chair all day long have a high risk for joint pain. Less movement means more stiffness in your joints. So get up and get moving. Change positions frequently. Take frequent breaks at work, and stretch or go for a short walk. If you can't leave the office, try taking phone calls while standing.

Nutrition involving vitamin D, Calcium, and Vitamin C

Eating a healthy diet is good for your joints, because it helps build strong bones and muscles. For your bones, make sure you get enough calcium every day. You can do this by eating foods such as milk, yogurt, broccoli, kale, figs, and fortified foods like soy or almond milk. If those foods don't tempt your taste buds, ask your doctor if calcium supplements are right for you. For your muscles, you need to get enough protein. Exactly how much you need depends on your age, sex, and how active you are. Most Americans get enough protein. Good sources include lean meats, seafood, beans, legumes, soy products, and nuts. Go for a variety. You also need vitamin D to keep your bones and joints in good health. Vitamin D helps your body absorb calcium from the foods you eat. Dairy products, many cereals, soy milk, and almond milk are fortified with vitamin D. You can ask your doctor about the proper amount of vitamin D and ways you can get it. Oranges may also give your joints a healthy boost. Some studies suggest that vitamin C and other antioxidants can help keep your joints healthy.

Add Ice for Healthy Bones & Joints

Ice is a great drug-free pain reliever. It helps relieve joint swelling and numbs pain. If you have a sore joint, apply ice wrapped in a towel or a cold pack to the painful area for no more than 20 minutes. Don't have ice or a cold pack? Try wrapping a bag of frozen vegetables (peas work best!) in a light towel. Never apply ice directly to the skin.

Build Muscles to Support Bones & Joints

Strong muscles support your joints. If you don't have enough muscle, your joints take a pounding, especially your spine, hips, and knees, which must support your entire body weight. Weight training exercises help build muscle and keep your muscles and surrounding ligaments strong. That way, your joints don't have to do all the work.

A certified personal trainer can show you the best exercises for healthy joints and how to do them correctly. Doing them incorrectly increases the chance of injury.

Help Joints With a Strong Core

Make sure your exercise routine includes activities that strengthen your core. That includes your chest, back, and abdomen.

Stronger abs and back muscles help you keep your balance and prevent falls that can damage your joints.

Know Your Limits for Your Joints' Sake

Certain exercises and activities might just be too tough for your joints to handle at first. Go slow. Modify exercises that cause joint pain. Ask a trainer, physical therapist, or coach to help you with modifications. You will likely feel some muscle pain after working out for a few days, especially the second and third day. Listen to your body, and learn the difference between "threatening pain" and good muscle-building pain.

Perfect Your Posture

Slouching is not good for your joints. Standing and sitting up straight protect your joints from your neck to your knees. Good posture also helps guard your hip joints and back muscles.

Posture is also important when lifting and carrying. For example, if you use a backpack, be sure to put it over both shoulders instead of slinging it over one. Being lopsided puts more stress on your joints. When lifting, use the biggest muscles in your body by bending at your knees instead of bending your back.

Protecting Your Body Protects Bones & Joints

Make sure you always wear a helmet, knee pads, and elbow and wrist pads when taking part in high-risk activities, including work-related ones such as repetitive kneeling or squatting. Even if you think you're a pro on a bicycle or on a pair of Rollerblades, you should never go without safety gear. Hit the wrong bump in the road, and you could be headed for a lifetime of trouble. Serious injuries or several minor injuries can damage cartilage. Injuries can lead to long-term joint problems.

Elbow and wrist braces, or guards, also help reduce stress on your joints during activities.

[Click here](#) for suggestions on proper nutrition for injury recovery.

[Click here](#) for foods that INCREASE inflammation.

The Ultimate Arthritis Diet

Stock your fridge and pantry with Mediterranean staples to fight pain and inflammation. |

By Amy Paturel

One of the most common questions people with any form of arthritis have is, "Is there an arthritis diet?" Or more to the point, "What can I eat to help my joints?"

The answer, fortunately, is that many foods can help. Following a diet low in processed foods and saturated fat and rich in fruits, vegetables, fish, nuts and beans is great for your body. If this advice looks familiar, it's because these are the principles of the so-called Mediterranean diet, which is frequently touted for its anti-aging, disease-fighting powers. Studies confirm eating these foods can do the following:

- Lower blood pressure
- Protect against chronic conditions ranging from cancer to stroke
- Help arthritis by curbing inflammation

- Benefit your joints as well as your heart
- Lead to weight loss, which makes a huge difference in managing joint pain.

Whether you call it a Mediterranean diet, an anti-inflammatory diet or simply an arthritis diet, here's a look at key foods to focus on – and why they're so good for joint health.

Fish

How much: Health authorities like The American Heart Association and the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics recommend three to four ounces of fish, twice a week. Arthritis experts claim more is better.

Why: Some types of fish are good sources of inflammation-fighting omega-3 fatty acids. A study of 727 postmenopausal women, published in the *Journal of Nutrition* in 2004, found those who had the highest consumption of omega-3s had lower levels of two inflammatory proteins: C-reactive protein (CRP) and interleukin-6.

More recently, researchers have shown that taking fish oil supplements helps reduce joint swelling and pain, duration of morning stiffness and disease activity among people who have rheumatoid arthritis (RA).

Best sources: Salmon, tuna, sardines, herring, anchovies, scallops and other cold-water fish. Hate fish? Take a supplement. Studies show that taking 600 to 1,000 mg of fish oil daily eases joint stiffness, tenderness, pain and swelling.

Nuts & Seeds

How much: Eat 1.5 ounces of nuts daily (one ounce is about one handful).

Why: "Multiple studies confirm the role of nuts in an anti-inflammatory diet," explains José M. Ordovás, PhD, director of nutrition and genomics at the Jean Mayer USDA Human Nutrition Research Center on Aging at Tufts University in Boston.

A study published in *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* in 2011 found that over a 15-year period, men and women who consumed the most nuts had a 51 percent lower risk of dying from an inflammatory disease (like RA) compared with those who ate the fewest nuts. Another study, published in the journal *Circulation* in 2001 found that subjects with lower levels of vitamin B6 found in most nuts had higher levels of inflammatory markers.

More good news: Nuts are jam-packed with inflammation-fighting monounsaturated fat. And though they're relatively high in fat and calories, studies show noshing on nuts promotes weight loss because their protein, fiber and monounsaturated fats are satiating. Just keep in mind that more is not always better, says Ordovás.

Fruits & Veggies

How much: Aim for nine or more servings daily (one serving = 1 cup of most veggies or fruit or 2 cups raw leafy greens).

Why: Fruits and vegetables are loaded with antioxidants. These potent chemicals act as the body's natural defense system, helping to neutralize unstable molecules called free radicals that can damage cells.

Research has shown that anthocyanins found in cherries and other red and purple fruits like strawberries, raspberries, blueberries and blackberries have an anti-inflammatory effect.

Citrus fruits - like oranges, grapefruits and limes are rich in vitamin C. Research shows getting the right amount of that vitamin aids in preventing inflammatory arthritis and maintaining healthy joints.

Other research suggests eating vitamin K-rich veggies like broccoli, spinach, lettuce, kale and cabbage dramatically reduces inflammatory markers in the blood.

Best sources: Colorful fruits and veggies the darker or more brilliant the color, the more antioxidants it has. Good ones include blueberries, cherries, spinach, kale and broccoli.

Olive Oil

How much: Two to three tablespoons daily

Why: Olive oil is loaded with heart-healthy fats, as well as oleocanthal, which has properties similar to nonsteroidal, anti-inflammatory drugs. This compound inhibits activity of COX enzymes, with a pharmacological action similar to ibuprofen," says Ordovás. Inhibiting these enzymes dampens the body's inflammatory processes and reduces pain sensitivity.

Best sources: Extra virgin olive oil goes through less refining and processing, so it retains more nutrients than standard varieties. And it's not the only oil with health benefits. Avocado and safflower oils have shown cholesterol-lowering properties while walnut oil has 10 times the omega-3s that olive oil has.

Beans

How much: About one cup, twice a week (or more)

Why: Beans are loaded with fiber and phytonutrients, which help lower CRP, an indicator of inflammation found in the blood. At high levels, CRP could indicate anything from an infection to RA. In a study published in *The Journal of Food Composition and Analysis* in 2012, scientists analyzed the nutrient content of 10 common bean varieties and identified a host of antioxidant and anti-inflammatory compounds. Beans are also an excellent and inexpensive source of protein, with about 15 grams per cup, which is important for muscle health.

Best sources: Small red beans, red kidney beans and pinto beans rank among the U.S. Department of Agriculture's top four antioxidant-containing foods (wild blueberries being in the number 2 spot).

Whole Grains

How much: Eat a total of 6 ounces of grains per day; at least 3 of which should come from whole grains. One ounce of whole grain would be equal to ½ cup cooked brown rice or 1 slice of whole-wheat bread.

Why: Whole grains contain plenty of filling fiber – which can help you maintain a healthy weight. Some studies have also shown that fiber and fiber-rich foods can lower blood levels of the the inflammatory marker C-reactive protein.

Best sources: Eat foods made with the entire grain kernel, like whole-wheat flour, oatmeal, bulgur, brown rice, quinoa.

Some people may need to be careful about which whole grains they eat. Gluten – a protein found in wheat and other grains – has been linked to inflammation for some people.

Should You Avoid Nightshades?

Nightshade vegetables, including eggplant, tomatoes, red bell peppers and potatoes, are disease-fighting power-houses that boast maximum nutrition for minimal calories.

They also contain solanine, a chemical that has been branded the culprit in arthritis pain. There's no scientific evidence to suggest that nightshades trigger arthritis flares. In fact, some experts believe these vegetables contain a potent nutrient mix that helps inhibit arthritis pain.

However, many people do report significant symptom relief when they avoid nightshade vegetables. So doctors say, if you notice that your arthritis pain flares after eating them, do a test and try eliminating all nightshade vegetables from your diet for a few weeks to see if it makes a difference.

Natural Therapy for Arthritis: Two of the simplest, least expensive and most effective methods of pain relief are heat and cold treatments. Heat treatments, such as heating pads or warm baths, tend to work best for soothing stiff joints and tired muscles. Heat enhances circulation, delivering nutrients to joints and muscles. It's good for getting your body limber and ready for exercise or activity. Cold is best for acute pain; it restricts blood vessels, slowing circulation and reducing swelling. It also numbs nerve endings, dulling pain.

How Does Yoga Help with Bone & Joint Pain and Arthritis?

Practicing yoga regularly can reduce pain, increase flexibility, improves function and lower stress. Yoga is proven to help people with arthritis improve many physical and psychological symptoms. Recent scientific studies of people with various types of arthritis show that regular yoga practice can help reduce joint pain, improve joint flexibility and function and lower stress and tension to promote better sleep. Yoga comes in many different forms, but generally involves positioning the body in various poses along with coordinated breathing and meditation exercises. Yoga is definitely one option for people with arthritis. Not only for the exercise benefits, but it's also beneficial in the mind/body area, promoting relaxation and stress reduction," says Dr. Kolasinski [MD, a professor of clinical medicine and rheumatologist at University of Pennsylvania]. Many people turn to yoga as a way to exercise gently, as well as to reduce tension and improve joint flexibility. Dr. Kolasinski adds that yoga also can help a person with arthritis build muscle strength and improve balance. In addition, yoga offers people with arthritis a form of exercise that is enjoyable enough to do regularly. Yoga has other benefits for people with stiff joints due to arthritis. Stretching exercises in general help improve range of motion, so the fact that you're stretching in yoga will help flexibility."

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