

# Rheumatoid Arthritis

No special diet or ‘miracle food’ can cure arthritis, but some conditions may be helped by avoiding or including certain foods or supplements. Arthritis is a general term describing over 100 different conditions that cause pain, stiffness and (often) inflammation in one or more joints.

Everyone with arthritis can benefit from eating a healthy, well-balanced diet to maintain general good health. Some conditions may be helped by dietary changes. For example, people with inflammatory conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis seem to benefit from an increased intake of omega-3 fats, found in oily fish such as sardines and salmon.

## Dietary recommendations for arthritis

General dietary recommendations for a person with arthritis include:

- Eat a well-balanced diet. This will help to maintain general good health, and a healthy weight.
- Avoid crash dieting or fasting.
- Increase dietary calcium to reduce the risk of osteoporosis in later life.
- Drink plenty of non-alcoholic fluids.
- Keep your weight within the normal range. Excess bodyweight increases the stress on joints, especially weight-bearing joints such as the knee and hips.

## Omega-3 fats and inflammation

Foods that contain omega-3 fats have been found to help reduce the inflammation associated with some forms of arthritis, such as rheumatoid arthritis. These effects are modest compared with medications, however they do not have side effects, and may also have other health benefits, such as reduced heart disease.

## Foods rich in omega-3 fats include:

- Fish – oily fish such as salmon and sardines, have greater amounts of omega-3 fats
- Linseeds and linseed (flaxseed) oil
- Canola (rapeseed) oil
- Walnuts
- Foods fortified with omega-3, such as margarines and eggs
- Some fish oil supplements.

*\*\*Try to eat at least two portions (1 portion = 140g or a small fillet) of oily fish a week*

## **Eat Iron Rich Foods**

Tiredness is a very common symptom of arthritis and can be made worse by anaemia (a deficiency of red blood cells to transport oxygen around the body). Anaemia can occur as a result of inflammation or because of the long-term use of non steroidal anti inflammatory drugs, which can lead to internal bleeding and stomach ulcers in some people.

Try to eat iron rich foods regularly: lean red meat, eggs, green leafy vegetables, pulses (peas, beans and lentils), and fortified breakfast cereals. Iron is more easily absorbed by the body if you have it at the same time as vitamin C, so have a portion of fruits or vegetables with your meal.

## **Eat Calcium Rich Foods.**

It is important that everyone gets enough calcium in their diet to ensure that their bones stay strong and healthy. This is an even greater consideration when you have rheumatoid Arthritis, as you have a higher risk of developing osteoporosis. Good sources of calcium include milk, yogurt cheese and other dairy foods, green leafy vegetables, soya drinks with added calcium, almonds and fish where you eat the bones, such as sardines and pilchards. Don't forget that lower fat varieties of milk i.e. skimmed or semi skimmed have the same amount of calcium, if not more than whole milk, so try to use lower fat versions wherever possible to cut down on your saturated fat intake and the extra calories.

## **Tips for managing arthritis and diet**

If you think a particular food may aggravate your arthritis, it can help to keep a diary of your food intake and symptoms. After a month, you may have some idea about which food could be provoking symptoms.