

## THE TRUTH ABOUT DIET AND ARTHRITIS

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Contrary to what some persons believe, there is no such thing as an "arthritis diet." No special diet or specific food will cure arthritis. Food has nothing to do with causing it, and food is not effective in treating or curing it.

### Nutrition Nonsense

Arthritis is a chronic inflammatory process of unknown origin which causes discomfort and pain in the joints. In an attempt to alleviate this pain, many arthritics become the victims of food faddists, quacks or self-appointed "arthritis experts" who advocate quick and miraculous cures with bizarre diet plans.

One survey revealed that approximately 2.5 million people in the United States have tried special diets or miracle foods to relieve this kind of ailment although medical authorities say such diets and foods are ineffective. Americans reportedly spend more than \$250 million a year on quick remedies for arthritis!

One ridiculous claim has been that you can eat your way into arthritis and then eat your way out. Such mixtures as cod liver oil and orange juice, honey and vinegar or alfalfa tea have been advocated as treatments. Extensive research has failed to show that the absence or presence of any food or vitamin causes or cures any form of arthritis.

Careful medical examination of people who claimed they were cured by fad diets revealed that most were self-diagnosed arthritics who really had no disease to be cured.

### Miracle Vitamin?

Many people believe arthritis is caused by vitamin and mineral deficiencies. By accepting the fact that no special diet or vitamin will cure arthritis, one will save disappointment, frustration and money. You can avoid expensive "arthritis foods," health foods or other food substitutes labeled for people with arthritis.

Patients with arthritis—particularly the rheumatoid type—like patients with many other chronic diseases, often have decreased plasma levels of vitamins. Vitamin supplements correct this plasma

deficiency but have no effect on the disease itself. Many experiments of this nature have been performed, especially with vitamins A, B-complex, C, D and E. The studies revealed that these vitamins do not alter the symptoms or cause of the disease. The only vitamins necessary for the arthritic patient are those obtained by eating a nutritionally balanced diet.

### Proper Diet

The importance of a nutritionally balanced diet cannot be over-emphasized. A balanced diet includes a variety of ordinary foods in amounts necessary to furnish essential nutrients and energy. Research has shown that nutritionally balanced meals eaten daily benefit anyone's overall health, muscle tone and—of special importance to the arthritic—build ability to resist the wear and tear of the disease.

A good diet for anyone, whether you have arthritis or not, is based on a selection from the basic four food groups. The four food groups are the milk group, the meat group, the fruit and vegetable group, and the bread and cereal group. Food choices within each group vary enough to allow for low, high or normal calorie needs, depending on whether you are underweight, overweight or of normal weight.

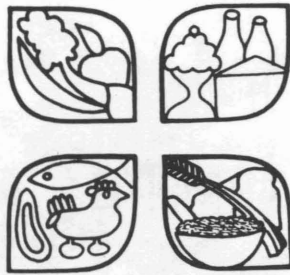
The overweight arthritis patient will benefit from a decrease of high calorie foods within the four food groups. For example, drink skim milk or buttermilk instead of whole milk, reducing the calories from about 170 down to 80 calories per day. Avoid foods such as sugar, rich desserts, fried foods, mayonnaise and oil dressings.

Overweight persons should discuss this problem with a doctor, who will provide a balanced, low-calorie diet. Extra weight places additional stress or pressure on the weight-bearing joints. Weight loss provides some relief from the discomfort and pain, and allows for increased activity which many overweight arthritic patients avoid because of the resulting pain and difficulty.

### Basic Four Food Groups

The specific amounts and foods within the basic four food groups are:

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First, the milk group. Adults require two or more servings; children, three or more servings; teenagers or lactating women, four or more servings. Milk and milk group foods provide three-fourths of the mineral calcium present in food.

Some adults do not drink milk. They believe calcium is important only during the growing years. People need this important mineral throughout life to prevent the demineralization process of the bone known as osteoporosis, a type of skeletal disorder in which the bones become porous and brittle.

Milk group foods also contribute riboflavin, one of the B vitamins; high quality protein; and vitamin A if the skim milk or buttermilk is fortified. However, the greatest contribution of milk group foods is the high percentage of calcium so vital to people whose bones need full strength to resist the effects of arthritis.

The next food group to consider is the meat group. An adult male requires only 56 grams of pure protein daily which can be obtained by eating two or more 2-to-3-ounce cooked servings of meat group foods along with a variety of other foods. Foods in this group are valued for their protein necessary for growth and repair of body tissues (muscles, organs, skin and hair). They also contribute important B vitamins—thiamin, riboflavin, niacin—and the mineral iron. Meat group foods include beef, pork, fowl, fish and shellfish. Meat alternates or substitutes include soybeans and all other dry beans, eggs, peanuts, peanut butter and other nuts.

You need at least four servings of fruit and vegetable group foods daily. This group is valued as a source of vitamins C and A. Include one serving of a good vitamin C source (grapefruit, oranges, strawberries, raw cabbage or broccoli) or two or more fair vitamin C sources (tomatoes, potatoes or greens). Vitamin C helps in the healing process and in resisting infection.

Serve one fruit or vegetable high in vitamin A (deep orange or deep green leafy vegetables) at least every other day. Vitamin A helps keep the skin and body lining healthy and helps prevent night blindness.

Fruits and vegetables also contribute bulk essential to healthy elimination, which may be a problem in arthritics because of a reduction in exercise. A balanced diet is important in keeping the body in good working condition for a normal person or an arthritic.

Include four or more daily servings of the bread and cereal group. These foods provide protein, iron, and several of the B vitamins necessary to keep the nerves and skin in good condition and promote good appetite. This is especially important at mealtime and snacktime for persons with rheumatoid arthritis who are frequently underweight.

Include breads and cereals that are whole grain or enriched (process of adding back B vitamins and iron lost in milling of wheat), cornbread, crackers, grits, macaroni, rice, rolled oats and other baked goods.

Other foods to balance the diet include fats and oils (mayonnaise, lard, butter) and sugars (jellies, syrups, preserves, concentrate sweets) which add flavor and interest as well as calories to meals. If you have a surplus weight problem, avoid too many of these foods. Too much weight puts a burden on the joints, usually causing greater inflammation and pain.

#### Recommendations

To summarize the recommendations made above:

1. Select a balanced diet, choosing foods from each food group.
2. Avoid fad diets! Follow the doctor's advice.
3. Maintain a normal weight to avoid strain of the involved joints.

#### References

- Arthritis: The Basic Facts*, The Arthritis Foundation, New York, 1974.  
*Arthritis Quackery*, The Arthritis Foundation, New York, 1971.

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