

Nutrition for Arthritis:

- *what you need to know*



The Idea of changing our eating or supplementing it to improve symptoms of arthritis is appealing to more and more people. But can dietary changes and supplements really help arthritis sufferers? There are lots of books, blogs and articles that claim a 'special diet' can cure arthritis. Unfortunately lots of these are based on opinion and lack any robust science behind them. Advice can often be conflicting and leave people more confused and frustrated. So here's a summary of what is the latest evidence is.....

What is Arthritis?

Arthritis means the inflammation of joints. About 10 million people in the UK have it, and most likely to be one of 4 types:

1. **Osteoarthritis** – is an extremely common form of arthritis, often referred to as 'wear and tear' of the joints in the body. The surface of the joint is damaged and the surrounding bone grows thicker. The joints most commonly affected are the knees, hips, hands and spine.
2. **Rheumatoid arthritis** – is the most common inflammatory arthritis. It is a chronic disease that affects the joints, often in the wrists, fingers and feet. Common symptoms include pain, stiffness and fatigue.
3. **Fibromyalgia** – affects muscles, ligaments and tendons. Symptoms include widespread pain, fatigue and sleep disturbance. The condition doesn't result in any damage to the joints or muscles that can explain the symptoms.
4. **Gout** – A very painful form of arthritis caused by the build up of uric acid in the joints, especially the big toe.

What Should I eat?

Many people believe that certain foods make their symptoms worse. Common culprits seem to be corn, wheat, citrus fruits, milk and tomatoes. But intolerances are very personal and not everybody benefits from excluding these otherwise nutritious foods. If you suspect a food is making your symptoms worse, try to follow the guide below to help you do so safely:

1. Remember, not everyone benefits for all the trouble they go to. Always monitor your symptoms carefully while you are avoiding a food and always reintroduce it if there are no improvements.
2. Only exclude one thing at a time – if you exclude everything at once, it will be less clear what food caused the benefit.
3. Remember that excluding food is not easy and may lead to deficiency of nutrients, depending on what is being avoided. If you are concerned, seek the support of a dietitian who will be able to suggest ways to keep your intake balanced

Top tips for Change

Although there are no diets that will cure arthritic pain, there is certainly proof that certain changes can ease symptoms. Here are the best:

1. Exercise and keep as active as you can.
2. Follow a Mediterranean style diet – plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables, olive oil and oily fish
3. Make sure you are not overweight, especially if you have osteoarthritis
4. Include plenty of omega 3 foods in your diet – oily fish 3 times per week, olive/rapeseed oil, walnuts, linseeds /chia seeds, avocado.
5. Supplements of omega 3, turmeric, and rosehip may be beneficial – always read the guidelines for taking them and monitor your symptoms - if there is no improvement, then chances are they are not worth your effort.

Helpful web site: [arthritis research uk](http://arthritisresearchuk.org)