

Rheumatoid Arthritis

Arthritis is an inflammation in the joint. The inflammation causes warmth, redness, pain and swelling in the joint. This type of chronic arthritis occurs in joints on either side of the body, such as both of the wrists, knees or hands. This symmetry helps to distinguish this type of arthritis from that of other forms of arthritis. Rheumatoid arthritis might also affect the eyes, lungs, skin, heart, nerves and blood. Rheumatoid arthritis is often known simply as RA.

Rheumatoid arthritis is thought to be attributed to a combination of environmental, genetic and hormonal factors. When it comes to rheumatoid arthritis, something seems to trigger the immune system and attack the organs and joints. Some theories have suggested that bacteria or a virus might alter the immune system, which causes it to attack the joints. Smoking has also been linked to the condition.

Diet has been strongly implicated in RA for many years, in regard to both cause and cure. A diet rich in whole foods, vegetables, and fibre, and low in sugar, meat, refined carbohydrate and saturated fat is the recommended general healthy diet that should be followed.

RA and osteoarthritis (OA) are different. In RA, the blood attacks the joints all over the body causing multiple joint pain and stiffness. In OA, more commonly fewer joints are affected, and symptoms are more commonly unilateral or one-sided. OA is simply natural degeneration.

Rheumatoid Arthritis and Diet

Common foods that tend to aggravate RA and therefore should be avoided are:

- Wheat
- Corn
- Milk and other dairy products
- Beef
- Nightshade family of foods including: tomato, potato, eggplant, peppers and tobacco

Dietary oil intake can significantly affect inflammation in the body depending on the type and the balance of fatty acids. Ideally:

1. Reduce the level of 'animal' fatty acids (Arachidonic Acid), through reducing the amount of red meat in the diet e.g. Beef and Lamb
2. Increase the level of fish oils (EPA omega-3 fatty acid) through increasing consumption of the following cold-water fishes:
 - Mackerel
 - Herring
 - Sardines
 - Salmon

Omega-6 is another essential fatty acid that is anti-inflammatory found in:

- Evening primrose
- Black current
- Borage oils
- BUT CAUTION: avoid vegetable oils, crisps, and microwaved foods.
- You should do your own research into Omega 6 as some nutritionists believe Omega 6 can be pro-inflammatory (i.e. not so good). Opinions vary.

Vitamin C can provide some anti-inflammatory action. Foods rich in vitamin C include:

- Broccoli
- Brussels sprouts
- Cabbage
- Citrus fruits
- Tomatoes
- Berries

Flavonoid-rich foods can be anti-inflammatory, these can include:

- Cherries
- Hawthorn berries
- Blueberries
- Blackberries

If you suffer with RA, then exercise is really important. Exercises such as swimming and cycling can be beneficial.

Many **botanicals** possess significant anti-inflammatory actions and are useful in the treatment for RA. These are:

- Turmeric
- Bromelain in Pineapple
- Ginger (fresh)

How to Treat Rheumatoid Arthritis:

1. Medication

Many different types of arthritis medications are available to help minimize joint pain, inflammation and swelling. Some of the common drugs used to prevent or slow down the progression of rheumatoid arthritis are:

- Corticosteroids
- Topical pain relievers
- Anti-inflammatory painkillers
- Narcotic pain relievers

Other stronger medications known as disease-modifying drugs work by interfering or suppressing the immune system's attack on your joints, such as:

- Plaquenil, which was once used for treating malaria
- Immune suppression drugs
- Other drugs such as Arava, Xeljanz and Azulfidine
- Biologic treatments like Rituxan, Orenia, Remicade, Humira and Enbrel

2. Exercise

Once the inflammation in the joints gets better, you need to participate in exercise to keep the joints flexible and allow the muscles surrounding the joints to get stronger. Range of movement exercises help the joints to stay healthy, which prevents the disease from taking over your body.

3. Therapy

Physical therapy can help improve mobility at the joint and reduce inflammation. Your therapist will also guide you on what exercises can be done to aid the situation, and reduce the pain.

Tips:

- For those who smoke, you might want to consider giving it up to help alleviate the symptoms associated with this condition.
- Rest is important for those who are suffering with the condition.
- Exercise can help to keep your joints flexible and strong.
- If the pain is too severe, surgery might be needed to help overcome the condition and provide pain relief.
- Early aggressive treatments have proven beneficial in preventing disability from occurring.