



## "Wear and Tear" Arthritis

What you can do to ease it

by AMY ROTHENBERG, ND, DHANP

AS A PRACTICING LICENSED NATUROPATHIC PHYSICIAN, I've received many phone calls and emails lately from arthritis sufferers looking for answers. With anti-inflammatory drugs like Vioxx®, Celebrex®, Naproxen, and Bextra® under scrutiny or pulled from the market, patients far and wide are wondering if gentler, effective approaches might exist in the world of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM). Osteoarthritis sufferers do have some CAM treatment options, which I'll discuss below.\* Anyone considering beginning a new treatment protocol, however, should do so under the guidance of their local physician.



## Normal wear and tear ...

Osteoarthritis, or degenerative joint disease, is common. In the U.S., it's estimated that more than 80% of people over age 50 have it to some degree. The joints that do the most work—knees, hips, back, and hands—are most often affected. Cartilage normally cushions the ends of bones within a joint; but osteoarthritis leads to breakdown of cartilage and bones rubbing against each other. Typical symptoms are morning stiffness, painful swollen joints, reduced range of motion, and possible deformation of the joints. Normal wear and tear on the body is enough to cause problems, especially for those with a family history of arthritis or other risk factors. Things that can make arthritis worse include food allergies, mineral deposits in the joints, past injury to the area, poor diet, stress, excess weight (adds stress to the weight bearing joints), hormone imbalance, and changes in barometric pressure.

## Complementary & Alternative approaches

Like all medicine, CAM recommendations work best when applied as soon as possible after diagnosis. Prognosis depends on the severity of the arthritis, the length of time someone has had it, tissue changes that have occurred, simultaneous medical conditions (both physical and emotional), and the person's ability to carry out the treatment protocol.

Some CAM approaches (e.g., certain herbs or supplements) work in a mechanistic way, by reducing inflammation and encouraging circulation. Other CAM approaches (like homeopathy or Chinese medicine) take an entirely different view of health and disease, with treatment plans individualized to the patient and how they experience their arthritis.

## Homeopathic help

As a premier CAM approach, homeopathy has much to offer. I always look for an arthritis patient's constitutional homeopathic remedy—a remedy that will reduce inflammation and pain in the joint *as the person moves to a more balanced overall state of health*. I choose a remedy that addresses how the patient experiences their arthritis symptoms, what brings the pain on, what makes it better or worse, how it impacts their overall health, and whether any other symptoms arise when the joints are especially inflamed. I try to see how

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arthritis fits into their life and if there are elements in the mental or emotional sphere that might need attention.

It's quite common for a patient to see me for some health problem, and return after homeopathic treatment to report: "By the way doc, not only is my indigestion (or asthma or PMS or ...) better, but my joints are much better, too." The patient may not have even mentioned their arthritis in the initial consult. As a patient under constitutional treatment moves toward health, however, she will improve on many levels—physical, emotional, and mental.

## What you eat

The following foods are known to have anti-inflammatory effects, so I suggest that my osteoarthritis patients add them to their diets.

- foods high in essential fatty acids, like flaxseed and cold water fish
- fruits high in bioflavonoids, like blueberries, raspberries, blackberries
- foods high in the element sulfur, like asparagus, garlic, onions, cabbage
- pineapple, as it contains the anti-inflammatory enzyme, bromelain.

I promote a diet high in vegetable fiber to keep the bowels moving and rid the body of that which it does not need. I also remind patients that eating meat tends to acidify the body, which can lead to more pain and inflammation.

Food allergies have been associated with arthritis and arthritis pain, but here's the catch—the most common offenders are foods that make up most typical American diets: dairy, wheat, eggs, citrus, refined sugars, and eggs. So if you are someone who *would be willing to follow a more limited diet*, you should get tested for food allergies. After testing, it's important

to work with a qualified nutritionist to come up with a diet and menu plan that incorporates the newfound information.

## Scientifically-backed supplements

The supplements I recommend have been endorsed by clinical studies in peer-reviewed medical journals. They include: glucosamine sulfate, fish oil, low dose Vitamin E, Vitamin C, and bromelain. If needed, I will suggest adding digestive enzymes to improve digestion and support proper elimination. For some patients, I add a botanical medicine formula that includes herbs such as ginger, alfalfa, turmeric, and white willow, all of which contain anti-inflammatory capacities. Dosages and frequency depend on the patient's weight, other supplements or medications they might be taking, their level of pain, and their pain tolerance.

## Hydrotherapy and stress reduction

I often recommend simple hydrotherapy techniques that patients can do at home. For those with arthritis, the simplest is the hot bath with 1–2 cups of Epsom salt (magnesium sulfate) dissolved in the water, which helps to draw out inflammation.

Stress reduction techniques are another important component to the CAM approach to arthritis. Whether for you that means yoga, meditation, prayer, music, socializing, massage, reading, exercising, or gardening, it is essential to build such activities into your daily life, as both a preventive and treatment measure.

*\*This discussion applies to osteoarthritis only. Rheumatoid arthritis, psoriatic arthritis, gout, and other joint diseases require different treatment approaches.*



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Amy Rothenberg, ND, DHANP, practices in Enfield, Connecticut. She teaches for the NCH and the New England School of Homeopathy. She writes and teaches on topics in natural medicine both here and abroad. Information on the upcoming NESH Two-Year Course beginning in April 2005 can be found at [www.nesh.com](http://www.nesh.com).

