

# Don't let Arthritis be a Pain



Health Matters

By Kerry Sauser

I know it's winter without even looking outside. I can tell by the number of people who come to my office with complaints of arthritis pain; their visits increase dramatically with the cold and inclement weather. They are not alone. Nearly 27 million Americans are affected by arthritis, accounting for nearly 25% of all visits to a primary care physician. And here's an eye-opening statistic: According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, arthritis and other rheumatic conditions cost the United States \$127.8 billion annually. That is 1.2% of the Gross Domestic Product, which is equal to a chronic, small recession. In other words, a very large number of us are spending a lot of money looking for relief from the effects of arthritis.

The two most widespread types of arthritis have similar outward symptoms, but they have very different causes. The first type, Osteoarthritis (OA), also called degenerative joint disease, is the most common type of arthritis. OA is a chronic condition characterized by the breakdown of a joint's cartilage. The breakdown of cartilage causes the bones to rub against each other, causing stiffness, pain and loss of movement in the joint. Contrary to what some believe, it is not caused by exercise, nor is it inevitable as we age. It can however be caused by long term overuse of joints, which is often exacerbated by joint misalignment due to inju-

ries, genetic predisposition, excess weight and improper movement patterns. (Think of what happens to your car when it's misaligned—parts wear. It's the same is true for the human body.)

The second type, Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is a chronic autoimmune disease, mainly characterized by inflammation of the lining, or synovium, of the joints. It is actually much more serious than OA, and can lead to long-term joint damage, resulting in chronic pain, loss of function and disability. RA is not limited only to the joints. It can affect all organs, and may be accompanied by low grade fever, lung inflammation, fatigue and anemia. In RA, as for other autoimmune diseases, for unknown reasons the immune system becomes confused and attacks healthy body tissue instead of just foreign substances that harm the body. With RA, the body is literally destroying itself.

Though the two have similar symptoms, OA and RA can be distinguished from each other. With osteoarthritis, joint pain normally gets worse with movement and improves with rest. With rheumatoid arthritis, joint pain is usually reduced by movement. A person with RA also experiences swelling, tenderness, stiffness or fever when joints are not used. An anti-CPP antibody test can most accurately diagnose RA.

Elimination of pain is what most arthritis sufferers desire. Often prescribed for pain are medications such as Acetaminophen (Tylenol), NSAIDs (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs like ibuprofen), and Cox-2 selective inhibitors (Celebrex). However these medications can be very dangerous and damaging to the liver, stomach and cardiovascular system. Some of the Cox-2 types are now considered so hazardous that use has become very restricted due to the number of cardiovascular incidents associated with their use.

There are safer alternatives. Inflammation triggers arthritis pain, so reducing inflammation also reduces pain. Many of the alternatives act to reduce inflammation without drugs. Fish Oil effectively diminishes inflammation and is extremely safe to consume. Also effective are arnica, boswellia, celery, ginger, glucosamine (rated better than ibuprofen after 8 weeks of use), turmeric and willow bark. (Though safe for most, be sure to consult a professional regarding dosage and potential contraindications.) Acupuncture also provides effective pain relief for many with no adverse side effects.

From the standpoint of functional medicine, it is most effective to deal with arthritis by reducing the underlying contributors to the pain-causing inflammation. With both types of arthritis, improper alignment can cause pain due to loss of joint fluid and cartilage. Practitioners who specialize in body work (chiropractors, massage therapists, physical therapists, and orthobionomists to name a few) can help get your body properly aligned. In addition, it's important to keep muscles around worn joints strong so they can help support the joint. Movement and exercise are key to muscle strength. If pain hampers your movement, exercise in a pool is recommended. The water buoys up the body and allows more comfortable movement. (This is a good place to note that excess body weight adds to the strain on joints, so avoid unnecessary pounds if you have arthritis.)

As I often mention, improper nutrition and toxicity in the body can contribute to many diseases, and arthritis is one. Those with arthritis should eat a diet that contains servings of fruits and vegetable at all meals—organic if possible to reduce toxin intake. Limiting foods

from the nightshade family (potatoes, tomatoes, eggplant, and peppers) seems to help some. Good nutrition will support healing and removal of toxins. With arthritis, toxicity causes minerals to be deposited in joints and worsens pain. Reducing toxicity frequently reduces the deposits and allows the joints glide smoothly with less pain.

Infra-red saunas and hydro-therapy can also provide comfort by detoxify the body and strengthening the immune system. You can try hydro-therapy at home in your shower. Take a comfortably hot shower for 3 minutes, then reduce the temperature to tepid/cool for 30 seconds, making sure your entire body is showered. Repeat the cycle 3 times, ending with cool. Done regularly, this therapy will help with circulation, detoxification and in some cases, pain reduction.

Rheumatoid arthritis has a complex set of underlying issues, most not yet fully understood. We do know, however, that the gastrointestinal tract can be closely tied to autoimmune disorders like RA, due to the fact that it contains about three-quarters of our body's immune system. Those with RA often do have digestive disorders (which are major contributors to inflammation) and nutrient deficiencies in zinc, copper b6 & magnesium. Persons with RA may want to consider nutritional testing to detect problem areas. Supplementation with protomorphogens (PMGs) may also assist with immune system stabilization and repair.

Arthritis can be managed in many different ways—this winter don't overlook simple but sound approaches. They can be safe, effective and take the bite out of arthritis.

Until next month...Heal well, be well...naturally!  
K.S.