

6 Ways to Ease Arthritis Pain

Supplements, herbs, and exercise can help

Arthritis. You may know it as a stiffness in your fingers or an ache in your knees, but it takes many forms. It encompasses more than 100 diseases and conditions that affect the joints and surrounding tissues, typically causing pain, swelling, and tenderness. The condition progresses and can become debilitating as cartilage that protects the ends of the bones gradually wears away. But exercise and dietary changes can significantly help alleviate discomfort.

1 Lose Weight

This is the first step toward easing arthritis pain, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Being overweight is directly linked to osteoarthritis of the knee, which is the most common form of the disease. The CDC says that losing about 11 pounds can cut a woman's risk of knee osteoarthritis by half.

Losing weight can also reduce stress on weight-bearing joints. In fact, each one-pound increase in weight translates to a two- to three-pound increase in the overall force on the knees.

2 Get Moving

Low-impact exercises such as cycling and swimming 30 minutes a day are great for arthritis patients. Walking, water aerobics, and t'ai chi are other good options. Staying active can keep joints from stiffening and help manage pain. And stronger muscles keep joints from rubbing against each other.

3 Eat Healthy Fats

The Arthritis Foundation says diet is increasingly seen as an antidote to arthritis pain. Omega-3 fatty acids appear to be particularly beneficial. Abundant in cold-water fish such as salmon and sardines, omega 3s are also available in supplement form. The body converts them to anti-inflammatory compounds. Krill oil supplements have recently been shown to be effective in easing pain and swelling caused by arthritis. Olive oil also combats inflammation.

4 Be an Egghead

Eggshell membrane contains compounds that are necessary for maintaining healthy joint and connective tissues. A study published in 2009 found that taking 500 milligrams daily led to significant reductions in joint pain and inflexibility. Positive responses were seen after seven days and continued throughout the 30-day trial, leading researchers to conclude that eggshell membrane "is a possible new, effective, and safe therapeutic option for the treatment of pain and inflexibility associated with joint and connective tissue disorders."

5 Try These Herbs

Two herbs from India appear to reduce chronic pain and inflammation: Curcumin is an active compound in the spice turmeric, and boswellia is a tree that emits a medicinal resin. Curcumin was shown to be at least as effective as ibuprofen at relieving knee osteoarthritis pain in a recent study. It also appears to protect cartilage from breakdown. Boswellia is an effective pain-reducer and anti-inflammatory agent.

6 Get Nutty

Extracts from the seed of the African shea tree appear to offer "multiple beneficial activities" in the treatment of osteoarthritis of the knees and hips, according to a study published in 2010. Participants experienced significant decreases in inflammation and cartilage breakdown after the 15-week trial. The nuts have been used traditionally in West Africa for the treatment of arthritis.

Natural Therapeutic for Joint and Connective Tissue Disorders . . .” by K. J. Ruff et al, Clin Interv Aging, 6/9/09 n “Osteoarthritis and Weight” by the Weight Watchers Research Department; “Overcoming Exercise Obstacles” by Dana Robinson, www.weightwatchers.com, 2011 n “Randomized Double-Blind Placebo-Controlled Trial on the Potential Modes of Action of SheaFlex70 in Osteoarthritis” by P. A. Cheras et al., Phytother Res, 8/10 n “Supplementation of Diet with Krill Oil Protects Against Experimental Rheumatoid Arthritis” by M. Ierna et al., BMC Musculoskelet Disord, 6/29/10 n “What You Can Do About Arthritis,” Tufts University Health & Nutrition Letter, 12/10

Tell Your Doctor

Prepare for your next doctor’s visit. A physician will want to know what type of arthritis pain you’re experiencing, so be specific. Is the pain burning or grinding? Sharp or sore? Is the discomfort more noticeable during certain activities or times of day?