Managing a Healthy Diet with Osteoarthritis

by MARIANNE BROWN

Foods to Avoid with Osteoarthritis

Osteoarthritis (OA) is the most common chronic joint condition, tending to occur in mainly women who are middle aged. This condition is usually due to an injury, obesity, overuse, genes, or weak muscles. This chronic condition can make everyday life tough and flare-ups can happen at any time. Did you know that certain foods can trigger flare-ups? This is why we are going to talk about foods to avoid with osteoarthritis.

My Experience

I was diagnosed with advanced stage OA in my lumber spine and neck at 33 and have never been obese or suffered any serious injuries.

OA can affect any joint, but occurs mostly in the hands, knees, hips, lower back and neck. This is commonly known as the wear-and-tear condition.

The smooth cushion between the bones (cartilage) breaks down, rubbing together, and joints can become very painful, causing inflammation, swelling and stiffness. The area can then become difficult to move.

What Factors Can Influence Symptoms?

- **Age**: Due to OA being degenerative, the symptoms worsen with age. Although, the severity can be reduced by changing your lifestyle.
- **Other medical conditions**: Other health conditions, such as heart problems, can reduce your ability to exercise. For example, diabetes' high glucose levels can make cartilage weaker, stiffer and more likely to break down, increasing inflammation.
- **Fibromyalgia**: This increases pain levels, stiffness and reduces the ability to gain a good night's sleep.
- **Obesity**: Being overweight can put enormous pressure on your joints and restrict mobility.
- **Lack of exercise**: Your muscles around your joints can weaken, increasing stiffness and reducing joint flexibility.
- **Unhealthy lifestyle**: Habits such as smoking and using recreational drugs can impact sleep and cause mental health problems, worsening symptoms of OA.
- **Drinking alcohol**: Drinking alcohol, especially beer, can contribute to flare-ups because of the high purine levels in commercial alcohol products.
- **Poor diet**: Eating foods that contribute to inflammation in the body can aggravate its symptoms. Avoiding certain foods can help you prevent OA flare-ups and reduce inflammation.

How Can Your Diet Affect Osteoarthritis?

Diet is a very underestimated tool to use for living a healthy life. It is especially critical for individuals with OA, in

order to manage symptoms. A high-quality diet may aid in the reduction in inflammation.

A healthy diet will help you maintain a healthy weight. According to research from PubMed Central, National Institutes of Health, some types of OA respond positively to a diet high in flavonoids and antioxidants, found in fruit and vegetables.

What Types of Foods Should I Avoid and Why?

Sugar

Sugar-rich foods such as cakes, cookies and other baked goods should be avoided.

Salt

Eating too much sodium causes your cells to retain water, which causes swelling.

Fried Food

According to the Arthritis Foundation, foods high in saturated fats can increase inflammation in the body.

White Flour

Refined products such as white bread, pasta, rice and cereals might make OA pain worse, especially products that contain gluten.

Omega 6 Fatty Acids

Harvard Medical School recommends limiting/avoiding foods such as eggs yolks and red meat. Saturated fats can increase inflammation and increase OA pain.

What Should I Eat to Reduce Symptoms and Flare-Ups?

Don’t panic. There are plenty of foods you can enjoy, as long as you track your symptoms. There is no reason why you cannot have an occasional treat, just make sure you are aware that you may have an increase in symptoms afterwards.

There are also substitutes you can use to reduce your risk of flare-ups. Instead of consuming sugar, opt for natural substitutes, such as pure maple syrup and honey. These are great substitutes for your sweet tooth without contributing to OA symptoms.

If you are a salt lover, there is a way to fill that craving too. I use plenty of herbs and spices to add to food, instead of overloading with salt.

Bone-healthy Foods to Consume

There are plenty of foods that are great for strengthening bones, muscles and joints, and they can help reduce inflammation:

- **Oily fish**: They are full of omega 3 fatty acids, such a sardines, mackerel, salmon and fresh tuna.
- **Soy**: If you cannot eat fish, or do not like it, soy is a great alternative for omega 3.
- **Oils**: According to Medicalnewstoday, extra virgin olive oil contains high levels of oleocanthal, which may have similar properties to nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs).
- **Dark leafy greens**: This includes foods like spinach, kale, chard and collard greens. They contain vitamin D, phytochemicals and antioxidants to support your immune system.
- **Broccoli**: Broccoli contains sulforaphane, vitamin K and calcium, which researchers believe could slow

down OA progression.
- **Green tea**: This refreshing drink has a high level of antioxidants called polyphenols. This substance is well documented for the reduction of inflammation and the slowing down of cartilage damage.
- **Garlic**: Garlic may improve symptoms of OA and cartridge damage. It contains diallyl disulfide. Just make sure you do not have a hot date that night.

The Mediterranean Diet

A study conducted by The American Association of Retired Persons reported that people who follow this type of eating plan have 20% less chance of dying of cancer and heart attacks.

I absolutely love this diet, although I add in plenty of white meat, as I want to ensure I am eating enough lean protein to combat fatigue and build muscle. This diet is full of fruit, vegetables, fish, legumes, wholegrains, fish, yogurt and healthy fats.

Studies suggest that these foods help reduce inflammation, therefore reducing many symptoms of OA. In my opinion, I find this style of eating allows me to maintain a healthy weight and I seem to sleep better too.

Supplement Food with Vitamins

If you have a healthy diet, most of the essential vitamins recommended for OA can be found naturally in your diet. But, if you feel you are not eating enough of these foods on a regular basis, then you can supplement it with these:

- Omega 3 fatty acids
- Calcium
- Vitamin A
- Vitamin C
- Vitamin D
- Vitamin E
- Vitamin K
- Ginger
- Curcumin (turmeric)

Vitamin D is especially crucial if you live in a climate with limited all-year-round sun. I would advise speaking to a professional who is qualified in advising you on diet and nutrition. I found this useful, as I was able to track which foods to avoid for flare-ups and learn about the utilization of essential vitamins. Please aware that some vitamins can cause unwanted effects if you take too much.