Avoid These Osteoarthritis Triggers to Stay Flare Free

by KRYSTINA OSTERMEYER

How to Avoid an Osteoarthritis Flare-Up

I don’t have osteoarthritis (OA), but I have chronic patella tracking issues, which has caused wearing of the cartilage in my knee. It hurts from time to time, but isn’t a consistent issue; however, a sports medicine physician told me that it was highly likely that I would have osteoarthritis in my knee at some point in my life. Since learning that, I’ve read all I can to learn about osteoarthritis.

As it turns out, there is a lot to know about osteoarthritis! Today I’d like to share what I’ve learned about what triggers osteoarthritis flare-ups and pain and how to avoid it.

Exercise

Exercise can be beneficial for the treatment of OA. However, if an exercise is performed incorrectly, for too long of a duration, or at a higher intensity than is indicated, it can cause a flare-up of osteoarthritis.

What to Do About It

Seek expert advice. Working with a physical therapist or athletic trainer can provide proper education about use of proper body mechanics, joint protection, pain-relief methods, and a home program, in addition to how to perform exercises correctly and safely.

Likely they will recommend range-of-motion exercises, low-impact cardiovascular exercise and muscle strengthening exercises.

Elevated Cholesterol

Recent research shows that elevated cholesterol leads to not only heart disease, but also bone loss. Research also shows that elevated cholesterol leads to “mitochondrial dysfunction, overproduction of reactive oxygen species, and heightened expression of degenerative markers in the breakdown of cartilage and chondrocytes (cells which secreted matrix of cartilage and became embedded in it).”

Ultimately, the consensus of this research is that elevated cholesterol can cause a progression in osteoarthritis through mitochondrial dysfunction in chondrocytes.

What to Do About It

The CDC estimates that 73.5 million adults (almost 32 percent) of the US population have elevated LDL cholesterol. This means that almost one-third of the US population is at risk for not just osteoarthritis, but a host of other diseases associated with high cholesterol, such as heart disease and type 2 diabetes.

There are several non-modifiable risk factors for high cholesterol, such as age and family history. However, a poor diet, smoking, inactivity and being overweight are all things that can increase the risk of having high cholesterol.

Working to reverse these risk factors can decrease the risk of having high cholesterol, thus reducing the risk of developing osteoarthritis.

Diet

Past research thought that dietary changes didn't help arthritis symptoms. However, newer research is proving otherwise.

For example, a 1989 study found that certain foods worsened all types of arthritis symptoms — red meats, dairy products, caffeine, salty foods, sugary foods, and nightshades (tomatoes and eggplants).

What to Do About It

Not all the above triggers may worsen each osteoarthritis sufferer's symptoms. However, avoiding the foods that are clearly causing problems is a great place to start.

A growing number of research studies are showing that polyunsaturated oils, such as sesame and sunflower oil, and omega-3 supplements to have a mild benefit to improving symptoms.

A vegan diet may also be beneficial for several reasons; a vegan diet is almost always absent in saturated fats and people often lose weight, both of which contribute to a reduction in symptoms.

Following an elimination diet for four weeks can help to figure out triggers; this diet is called the Four-Week Anti-Arthritis Diet and was created by Dr. Neal Barnard. Basically, the arthritis sufferer eats only foods from a very basic list for four weeks, then reintroduces foods, one at a time, every two days. In this way, triggers can be identified.