



# Nightshade Vegetables

by ANGELA FINLAY

---

## How clever changes to your diet can eliminate symptoms

Some people swear that certain ingredients cause havoc in their bodies, especially when it comes to chronic disorders like IBS, fibromyalgia, or arthritis. When you live with a chronic pain condition, you understandably want to do everything in your power to reduce the daily effects that can physically wear down your bones and joints, and also wear on your emotional health. Naturally, your diet is a good place to begin to make changes.

Many people insist that the nightshade family of plants may hold the solution to your pain problems. From reduced inflammation to significantly less pain, proponents of the nightshade veggie theory encourage fellow sufferers to cut them out completely, and wait for the wonderful results. But is this prescription justified? Find out whether nightshades plants may be inflaming your osteoarthritis, and what you can do about it.

## Nightshade Vegetables and Their Impact on Pain

Naturopaths and patients have long suspected that the Solanaceae vegetables (also known as nightshade vegetables) have a potentially negative impact on certain chronic conditions, especially those that are characterised by pain and inflammation. Plants like tomatoes, eggplants, potatoes and bell peppers are therefore more dangerous than they look – to certain people.

In fact, experts are divided on the matter. While some scientists and alternative medicine practitioners insist that the danger can be traced to specific compounds in the vegetables, others are skeptical, pointing out the severe lack of scientific evidence to back up these claims. In any case, there are some possible – if not probable – components of nightshade vegetables that may affect how you experience pain:

- **Oxalic acid.** In high amounts, oxalic acid can inhibit the absorption of calcium, weakening bones and leading to osteoarthritis or osteoporosis. However, there are conflicting opinions on whether nightshades do indeed have a “high amount” of this particular compound.
- **Glycoalkaloids.** This alkaloid family includes solanine in potato, tomatine in tomato, and capsaicin in peppers, which are thought to worsen inflammation in some people. Solanine appears as green areas on the skin of potatoes, and those potatoes can cause gastrointestinal distress, so be sure to discard them.
- **Toxins that may cause convulsions.** Unfortunately, some people confuse the nightshade family of vegetables with *Atrope belladonna*, the plant known as “deadly nightshade”. While this weed is also part of the Solanaceae family, the similarity stops there: in large amounts, deadly nightshade can cause convulsions and death, but it has a vastly different chemical makeup than the commonly enjoyed vegetables.

Since there have been so few studies on the vegetables and their effects, but so much anecdotal evidence pointing to their negative impact on pain, those who suffer from a chronic pain condition like osteoarthritis should proceed cautiously. Cutting out nightshade vegetables may not be a good idea for everyone, since they’re really very healthy: tomatoes and peppers are high in antioxidants and help lower your risk of cancer, eggplant is

---

---

packed with vitamin K, potatoes are high in vitamin C, and all are loaded with fiber for a healthy digestive tract.

On the other hand, food sensitivity is a common pain trigger, and has been linked to a range of other discomforts. It may be that some people have an intolerance to certain nightshade vegetables, in which case it's important to get to the bottom of the issue as quickly and efficiently as you can.

### **Sorting out Food Intolerance for Better Symptom Management**

Instead of categorically refusing or agreeing with food theories, focus instead on your own food sensitivities. It could be that many arthritis sufferers are sensitive to tomatoes, eggplant or peppers, and you could be too, but there's only one way to find out, and that's with an elimination diet.

If you suspect that nightshades may be causing you problems, cut them all out of your diet for several weeks (some nutritionists suggest you wait as long as three months) before beginning to reintroduce them, one by one. Keep a written record of your symptoms and reactions as you add each nightshade, and be sure to wait at least a week between each reintroduction.

You may find that one or all of the nightshades interfere with your pain management, in which case it's perfectly logical to keep them out of your diet. However, be sure you replace the lost vitamins, minerals and other nutrients that you were getting through the nightshade plants with other fresh fruits and vegetables to ensure your body stays in top shape to protect against your osteoarthritis.