Vitamins for Osteoarthritis

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Using Vitamins to Your Advantage

There isn't a specific diet for osteoarthritis, but certain compounds seem to target the joints more than others. Recent research has returned some welcome results on how a few common protective vitamins can directly impact your skeleton, with benefits ranging from fewer bone marrow lesions to a stronger bone and joint network.

These findings are good news for OA patients who want some more control over their disease management. But while a dietary shift may be an easy and safe route to better bone health, it's not a cure-all – and in some cases, increasing your vitamins can work against you.

OA and Vitamin K

Vitamin K is making the most headlines in respect to OA treatment, given there seems to be a pretty powerful link between this vitamin and symptoms. A 2006 study found that adequate vitamin K levels were associated with less visual evidence of OA, and a 2013 study revealed that a vitamin K deficiency can lead people to develop OA in the knees.

Some experts suspect that bone improvement isn't the result of the vitamin itself; rather, it's the effect that vitamin K has on certain proteins in bone and cartilage that makes all the difference. But its power seems to stretch even farther than that, as higher levels of vitamin K are linked to less inflammation, and better blood health.

Antioxidants and Their Effect on OA

There are many reasons to include more fruits and veggies in any diet, but for OA sufferers, antioxidants may be the most important reason. Studies have found that a few specific antioxidants – vitamin C, vitamin A and vitamin E – are particularly helpful when it comes to bone health.

Antioxidants are natural protectors. They fight against compounds known as free radicals that result from the natural process of oxidation within your body's tissues. These free radicals try to take molecules from other cells, which can damage the very DNA of the cell and set the stage for disease. Since OA involves the breakdown of bone cells and cartilage, better cell protection means slower decay.

There are many naturally-occurring antioxidants, but OA research has focused quite a bit of attention on three common and accessible vitamins:

- **Vitamin C.** Studies have found that vitamin C helps to reduce bone surface size, which is important in the protection of OA. Vitamin C may also reduce the number of bone lesions – by up to 50%, in some cases – and has a noticeable effect on joint pain.
- **Vitamin E.** This restorative vitamin has been found to reduce the pain and overall symptoms of OA. Some

research has shown that vitamin E also has the potential to stimulate the growth of cartilage cells.
- **Vitamin A.** Certain forms of vitamin A, like beta-carotene or lutein, are suspected to play an important role in bone growth and protection, but too much vitamin A (especially in its retinol form) may actually be bad for your bones.

Next page: risks and benefits of supplementing for OA.

Antioxidants and Their Effect on OA

Although there isn't definite evidence that antioxidants will work wonder for every OA patient, you have every reason to include more of them in your diet. Red and orange produce are great sources of vitamin A, vitamin C is found in a surprising array of colorful fruits and veggies, and you'll get a big boost of vitamin E from nuts, avocados, and vegetable oils. As for vitamin K, look to dark, leafy vegetables for your daily dose.

Risks and Benefits of Supplementing for OA

As a general rule, food sources are always the best way to get your vitamins. In most cases, switching out unhealthy snacks for fresh produce and increasing your vegetable portions at every meal will bump up your levels considerably. However, some supplements can be helpful ways to boost your levels into a therapeutic range, as long as you use them properly.

Vitamins E and C can be taken as supplements, if your doctor recommends. However, you can get too much of a good thing: some studies suggest that too much vitamin C could eventually cause bone spurs, and too much vitamin E can increase your risk of cardiovascular disease. Vitamin A is tricky – it seems that too much or two little can increase your risk of osteoporosis.

The natural vitamins and other compounds found to be safe and helpful for arthritis include:

- Calcium
- Vitamin E
- Vitamin C
- Omega 3
- Vitamin D3
- Ginger

- Turmeric
- SAMe
- MSM
- Bromelain

Glucosamine sulfate and chondroitin sulfate are natural components of the cartilage in your body, and these supplements are considered to be well-tolerated and safe to use. But you'll probably come across plenty of supplements that make big claims about benefits, and that's where you need to pay very close attention.

One point to keep in mind is that there is little to no official monitoring of the purity and strengths of many supplements. In turn, you take a risk each time to introduce a supplement, and some people undoubtedly learn that the hard way. Even "healthy" supplements can have side effects, which means you shouldn't add any to your diet without first speaking with your doctor.