Eat For Health: Arthritis and Nutrition

By: Joel Hirschberg, MD Medical Director, Eisenhower Medical Center Arthritis Education Program

The rigors of arthritis can sometimes seem unbearable. Joint pain and stiffness tend to impede movement and heighten the overall sense of discomfort and frustration. Unfortunately, there's no magic pill or potion to cure arthritis or forever rid the body of arthritic pain. Lighten up arthritis sufferers. One of the best remedies against arthritic pain and stiffness is within your reach — weight management, which can be accomplished with the help of a good diet and proper nutrition.

Although there is no scientific evidence that states certain foods or diets are beneficial in relieving arthritis pain and symptoms, what is clear is the fact that excess weight burdens the hips, knees, ankles, feet and joints that are frequently affected by arthritis. Since exercise is already limited for arthritis sufferers by pain and stiffness, often the only alternative to weight loss is a modified diet — particularly one low in fat and high in vitamins and nutrients.

Poor nutrition is a common side effect of weight loss, and as a result, those afflicted with rheumatoid arthritis frequently experience a deficiency in several vitamins and minerals, including folic acid, vitamins C, D, B6, B12 and E, calcium, magnesium and zinc, to name a few. One way to battle these deficiencies is with over-thecounter vitamin supplements. While supplements may help to reduce vitamin and mineral deficiencies, there is no hard evidence to suggest that such supplements will slow down the progression of arthritis or alleviate its symptoms.

With more than 100 forms of arthritis, it is nearly impossible to suggest one diet that will best suit the many varieties. It is widely suggested, however, that people with arthritis follow a diet based on variety, balance and moderation, with the key ingredient being moderation. Variety, however, may be difficult for arthritis sufferers considering that pain and stiffness may limit their ability to shop for and prepare food.

There is one universal diet suggestion: ample servings of fresh fruits and green vegetables should be eaten daily. This will not only aid in weight loss and management and provide a diet rich in vitamins and minerals, but also provide antioxidants, which have been shown to possess far-reaching health benefits and can help protect against chronic illness.

Your doctor and health care professional can help you develop a food plan that best suits your age, weight, activity level, lifestyle and condition, and one that you will enjoy. Nevertheless, please talk to your doctor before making any drastic changes to your diet or other lifestyle changes. Eat, live and be healthy.

Eat for Health

Arthritis sufferers take note — a good diet low in fat and high in nutrients can: Protect against the nutritional side effects of medications Strengthen the muscles that support joints Aid in weight loss, reducing joint stress Reduce systemic inflammation Provide vital nutrients for overall good health Events

Moans, Groans & Arthritic Bones

Friday, January 7, 1:30 to 3 p.m. Joel Hirschberg, MD, Rheumatology

The Root of Evil: Back Pain

Friday, February 18, 1:30 to 3 p.m. David Tahernia, MD, Orthopedic Spinal Surgeon Moderated by Joel Hirschberg, MD Call 760-773-4535 for information and reservations.

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