Natural Supplements to Ease Arthritis Pain

by ANNA SCANLON

Beneficial Supplements for RA

Patients with rheumatoid arthritis can take a number of supplements to help reduce disease activity and pain. It is important to understand that any vitamins and supplements will not cure RA but will, in the long run, help your body get healthier.

Vitamin D

According to research, vitamin D deficiency is heavily linked to RA and RA symptoms. Studies have shown that the more vitamin D deficient a patient is, the more severe the symptoms of RA are. Additionally, vitamin D is essential for healthy bones, as it helps the body process calcium.

Thus, those with RA may wish to take a vitamin D supplement. If, after testing from a doctor determines that vitamin D levels are severely low, a vitamin D injection may be in order to help restore the presence of the vitamin in the body.

Vitamin D is found naturally in dairy and grains, so if you adhere to a vegan or gluten-free diet, it is important to monitor your vitamin D intake. You should also be monitoring it if you live in a colder climate or if you do not go out in the sun often, as vitamin D is also absorbed through the skin via sunlight.

Calcium

Besides vitamin D, there are other nutritional needs to consider if you suffer from RA. For example, many RA medications cause the blockage of certain vitamins and minerals to be absorbed in your body, meaning that you need to make up for it extra elsewhere with an injection or supplement. Additionally, because of chronic inflammation, as an RA patient you may need more protein than someone who does not have RA. A lack of protein can reduce your energy levels and in general make you feel more unwell.

If you take corticosteroids, you may need to speak to your doctor about upping your calcium intake, as they can make it more difficult for your body to use the calcium you're already getting. As you may already know, calcium is essential for strong bones and keeping your bones healthy—which is a major factor in dealing with RA.

While you can increase your calcium intake with supplements (and possible injections if your doctor feels it is necessary), you can also up your intake of certain calcium rich foods to get more of the nutrient. Most dairy is naturally rich in calcium, however there are other foods that can fulfill your calcium needs. For example, seafood, leafy greens (like kale and broccoli), white beans, figs, almonds, oranges, sesame seeds, orange juice and even Cheerios can help bolster your calcium intake.

Folic Acid

Folic acid, or folate, is another big vitamin that drugs for RA can interfere with. You may hear this vitamin mentioned in conjunction with pregnancy, as pregnant women need to up their intake to prevent birth defects, boost their metabolism and help their baby form inside the womb. However, it also supports your body's metabolism and can help with things such as RA hair loss.

Many drugs used to treat RA, like methotrexate and sulfasalazine can interfere with the body's folic acid absorption, so it is important to take supplements or increase your intake naturally. Folic acid is naturally present in broccoli, citrus, raspberries, strawberries, spinach, collard greens, romaine lettuce, avocado, lentils and beans and most other vegetables (notably carrots, corn and celery).

Protein

In general, I find that eating more protein helps increase my energy, something that many of us are sorely lacking when we have RA or a similar disease. And because doctors say you may need more protein when dealing with RA, it is important to get as much of it as possible in your diet. Protein helps build strong bones, cartilage and muscles, all of which can be affected by RA.

Although protein is incredibly important for a healthy individual, it is one of the few vitamins and minerals that is very difficult to supplement. Supplements of the protein variety are typically for those looking to build lean muscle mass and not usually for those who are simply looking to up their protein intake. However, protein bars that can be purchased from grocery stores, drug stores or health stores can serve as a supplement in addition to a diet already rich in protein.

In general, the biggest source of protein for humans and animals is meat, however this doesn't mean vegetarians have to go without. Your protein intake can be upped with a variety of foods such as cheese, peanuts and other nuts, seeds, seafood, lentils, tofu, yogurt and beans. Ensuring you have adequate protein (your doctor can help you decide what is the best amount for you), will help ensure that you keep your bones, muscles and cartilage healthy and in tact.

Vitamin B

Vitamin B is also helpful for those suffering from low energy and helps the nervous system function. It can also boost metabolism. Vitamin B is divided into several different categories, such as B12, B6, B3, B2 and B1. In order to boost your energy, you can take a vitamin B-complex supplement in the form of a pill, as vitamin B complex refers to all eight forms of the vitamin.

However, there are a few vitamin B rich foods that you can add to your diet in order to naturally keep your energy up. These include bananas, yeast, whole grains, potatoes, legumes and chilli peppers. Meat in general also provides a good source of vitamin B, in addition to protein.

Omega 3

Lastly, omega 3 fatty acids can help lubricate your joints and ease morning stiffness. Omega 3 fatty acids are found most often in fish oil, which explains why many people with RA are given fish oil pills to compensate for this. Your doctor will likely prescribe a fish oil supplement to help with joint pain and movement. Additionally, Omega 3 fatty acids can be found in walnuts, salmon, flaxseeds, tofu, beef, shrimp, soybeans and sardines.

Conclusion

Although taking supplements is generally considered safe, it is important to speak with your rheumatologist or family doctor before beginning any new regime. This way, you can ensure you are getting the correct level of vitamins for your body.