3 Types of Food to Avoid With Rheumatoid Arthritis

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Foods to Avoid with Rheumatoid Arthritis

If you have rheumatoid arthritis (RA), you probably take a combination of prescription and over-the-counter medications to manage the disease process and the symptoms you are experiencing. However, there are also other things you can do that could lessen your symptoms. Have you ever wondered how diet affects rheumatoid arthritis?

Although there is no cure for RA, there are several studies that indicate a link between diet and the inflammation that worsens RA symptoms.

Certain foods may improve symptoms, whereas some other foods may worsen symptoms.

Foods That May Exacerbate the Symptoms of RA

According to the Arthritis Foundation, there are several foods that you should avoid or decrease from your rheumatoid arthritis diet. Not only do they increase inflammation, but they can increase the risk for other chronic conditions such as heart disease and diabetes.

Below, you'll discover what types of foods to avoid with RA.

Foods High in Sugar

If you have a nightly ice cream habit, frequent the donut shop and have a tough time passing up the candy dish at work, it may be time to decrease your intake.

However, if you’re willing to try a sugar substitute, you’re in luck! There are a variety of options available: stevia, aspartame and sucralose are all non-caloric options. Caloric sweeteners include maple syrup, agave and honey.

Foods High in Salt

Excess salt can also increase inflammation, and any additional risk of inflammation should be avoided when you have rheumatoid arthritis.

The recommended amount of sodium for the average American is 2,300mg or less, but people with comorbid conditions such as diabetes, kidney disease and hypertension should limit their sodium intake to 1,500mg per day. However, the average American eats upwards of 3,400mg of sodium per day. Therefore, if you have RA, it is very important to be cautious about sodium in your diet and read nutritional labels if you are unsure.

Is there another reason to avoid sodium? If you’re on a corticosteroid to treat your RA, it is likely that the medication will cause the body to retain the sodium; so, experts agree it may be helpful to limit sodium intake to

1,500mg per day in this situation.

Not All Fats Are Created Equal

Dietary fat has been a hot-button topic over the past several years. Historically, fat has been demonized. However, it has been recognized that certain types of fat are not "bad guys". In fact, some types of fat have important functions and benefits in diet, nutrition and overall health.

However, certain fats are not good for inflammation. These fats include saturated fats, trans fats and omega-6 fatty acids.

Saturated fats are the type of fats found in animals, such as cheese, butter and meat. They can raise total and LDL cholesterol (also known as "bad" cholesterol). Take note, saturated fat does not need to be cut out of the diet completely, but it should comprise no more than 10% of the total calorie intake. However, coconut oil is a plant-based saturated fat and may be the exception, as recent studies indicate that it has anti-inflammatory properties.

We hear "omega fatty acids" and automatically assume it is a "good fat". However, there are two types of omega fatty acids: omega-3 fatty acids and omega-6 fatty acids. Omega-3 fatty acids are found in fish and certain nuts and seeds, whereas omega-6 fatty acids are found in oils such as corn oil, sunflower oil and vegetable oil. Large intake of these types of fatty acids can increase inflammation. Therefore, efforts should be made to limit your intake of inflammatory omega-6 fatty acids if you have rheumatoid arthritis.

Trans fats though should be avoided at all costs. Trans fats are found naturally in tiny amounts in certain foods and can be unavoidable, but is also found in commercial baked goods, margarine, and fried foods. Trans fats not only increase total cholesterol and LDL, but they also decrease HDL (sometimes referred to as "good" cholesterol).

The Bottom Line…

This is not a full list of foods to avoid with rheumatoid arthritis. They are simply guidelines and recommendations that if followed, could reduce the risk of inflammation. This is important because inflammation can worsen RA symptoms. Some other possible methods for reducing the risk of inflammation exacerbation are: avoiding highly processed and fried foods, avoiding dairy if you find you have an intolerance for it, limiting or avoiding alcohol and reducing the frequency of high-heat cooking. However, make sure to always follow the diet recommendations given to you by your physician. If you are unsure of making any changes to your diet, talk to your healthcare provider beforehand.