9 Anti-Inflammatory Foods to Include in Your RA Diet

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Your Guide to an Anti-Inflammatory Diet for Rheumatoid Arthritis

A nutritious diet is not only a key ingredient for overall health — it can also be beneficial to those managing their rheumatoid arthritis. Scientists have found that patients with rheumatoid arthritis (RA) have an altered gut biome, which indicates that diet can play an important role in the development and progression of RA. Given this finding, changes in diet may be able to change the course of your disease and help with your symptoms. As an added bonus, a healthy and anti-inflammatory diet for rheumatoid arthritis can boost your energy levels, your immune system and your mood!

Focus on an Overall Healthy Diet

A diet that focuses on whole foods with a heavy emphasis on fruits and vegetables is a healthy choice for everyone. For example, a Mediterranean diet, full of vegetables, olive oil and fish has been shown to decrease inflammation and is thus beneficial for many chronic diseases, including RA and cardiovascular disease. Since people with RA are much more likely to develop heart disease, lowering both of these risks is a win-win.

Foods to Eat for an RA Diet

In addition to making overall changes to your diet, focusing on incorporating specific foods with anti-inflammatory effects can also help. Inflammation-busting foods that may improve your RA include a variety of whole foods and spices.

1. Fruits

Fruits in your diet increases levels of phytochemicals in your body and can help to manage symptoms of many chronic diseases, including arthritis, cardiovascular disease, asthma and cancer. These phytochemicals can help reduce inflammation, which is a key component of RA. Fruits such as blueberries, grapes, plums and grapefruits have specifically been identified as the best for reducing symptoms of RA. In fact, in a recent study of RA patients, blueberries were one of top foods that helped to alleviate RA symptoms.

2. Vegetables

Leafy green vegetables are full of antioxidants, which can help decrease inflammation. This is an important factor in the progression of RA. The darker the vegetable is, the more likely it is to be full of antioxidants, so be sure to load your shopping cart with kale, spinach, broccoli and other dark green vegetables.

3. Fish Rich in Omega-3 Fatty Acids

Omega-3 fatty acids decrease inflammation by lowering pro-inflammatory proteins, C-reactive proteins and interleukin-6. This decrease of inflammation can lead to an improvement of RA symptoms. A clinical trial showed

that RA patients taking fish oil had less pain and morning stiffness than the control group, who did not take fish oil. The best sources of this fish oil are cold water fish, such as salmon, sardines and tuna.

4. Nuts

If you are not a fan of fish, you can get your omega-3 fatty acids by eating nuts, which happen to also be a great source of muscle-building protein. The nuts with the highest levels of omega-3s are walnuts, almonds, macadamia nuts and hazelnuts.

5. Olive Oil

Olive oil is a key part of a healthy diet. Not only does it improve heart health, but it has also been shown to be great for RA patients managing their symptoms. Olive oil contains oleocanthal, which can reduce inflammation by inhibiting COX enzymes, much in the same way that NSAIDs work. In lab studies, oleocanthal has been shown to slow joint damage and RA progression.

6. Whole Grains

Whole grains are full of anti-inflammatory nutrients, including phytic acid, vitamin E and selenium. Foods like oatmeal, bulgur and brown rice contain these nutrients, with the added benefit of fiber, and can help with weight control.

7. Spices

Certain spices, including ginger, turmeric and curcumin have long been thought to fight inflammation. Ginger can help to decrease inflammation by slowing down the production of prostaglandin, one of the chemicals responsible for pain and inflammation. Turmeric, and its active ingredient curcumin, can also reduce inflammation and pain in RA patients.

8. Beans

Beans and other legumes contain high levels of antioxidants, which can lower your risk of inflammation. This group of food also includes soybeans, which means that foods like tofu and edamame can help to fight the inflammation associated with RA.

9. Green Tea

There has been lots of buzz about the benefits of green tea for overall health. One of the reasons why green tea is so healthy is that it contains polyphenols, which have both antioxidant and anti-inflammatory benefits. Green tea has been found to help RA patients with their symptom management.

Foods to Avoid With RA

While focusing on foods that help with symptoms and inflammation is good, you can also help your RA by avoiding certain foods. In one survey, a quarter of patients with RA reported that their diet directly affects their RA symptoms, with sugar-filled soda and desserts most commonly listed as the types of foods that make their RA worse.

Foods high in saturated fats, including red meat and full-fat dairy, can also trigger inflammatory reactions in our body. Trans fats, which are added to processed foods to help improve shelf life, can lead to inflammation. It is best to avoid these types of foods for your heart and joint health.

Heavy alcohol use can also lead to inflammation, while also posing a risk when combined with certain RA drugs, such as acetaminophen and methotrexate.

Certain vegetables, called nightshade vegetables, contain high levels of solanine and have been linked to a worsening of symptoms in RA. Examples of nightshade vegetables include eggplant, red peppers, tomatoes and potatoes. If you notice your symptoms get worse after eating these vegetables, it might be beneficial to avoid them or to eat them in moderation.

Keeping a food diary can help you track which foods have a negative impact on your symptoms, and it can help you tailor your anti-inflammatory diet for rheumatoid arthritis. However, before making any dietary changes, it is important to talk with your doctor to make sure that it fits your medical needs.