How to Have a Healthy and Happy July 4th

by BRENDA VANTA

You and RA on Independence Day

Don’t let the painful joints be the cause of avoiding the big party and fireworks on July 4th! With a little bit of planning and organizing this holiday, you can spend quality time with your family and friends and have lots of fun. Think about what you can do a few days before and during the party to prevent painful flare-ups.

Don’t Forget to Take Your Meds

Take the meds as usual at the same time each and every day. If you plan to spend the whole day away from home, don’t forget to take them with you. Doctors have a very good reason why they recommend taking the medication every day around the same time. If you miss some painkillers for example, the pain may become harder to treat. Taking a biological agent or a DMARD (disease modifying anti-rheumatic drugs) only once in a while will not benefit you in any way. Each drug has a specific duration of action, and skipping a dose or not taking it at regular times will alter its benefits (effects). Even a less expensive or effective drug taken regularly may help you more than taking the best drug but often skipping the recommended dose.

Watch What You Eat

Be careful what you choose to eat, for two reasons:

Diet can play a significant role in how some drugs are absorbed in the body. You may take a highly effective drug like DMARD (including methotrexate), and cyclosporine, but drinking apple, orange and grapefruit juice can make it ineffective, as these juices reduce the absorption of these drugs.

Milk, yogurt and other dairy products interfere with the absorption of penicillamine, another DMARD also used for rheumatoid arthritis. You can still consume these foods, but do it 3 to 4 hours after your took the meds, or as the pharmacist instructs you.

If you take other medications (for example antidepressants, antibiotics or blood thinners), be aware that you also have to watch what you eat.

Besides interfering with the meds, foods can aggravate or relieve joint inflammation. Pro-inflammatory foods are the ones that you will probably see at a party: fried foods, processed products such as sausages, hot dogs, hamburgers and pizza, fatty red meats, and sugary drinks. Stay away from them and consume more anti-inflammatory foods such as baked or grilled lean meats and fish, along with fresh fruits and vegetables. Drink plenty of water since pain and inflammation can improve if you are well-hydrated.

To drink or not to drink? Well, a number of studies are telling us that alcohol can actually improve the symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis as long as it is consumed in moderation. Scientists still believe that more research is needed to confirm the benefits of regular, moderate consumption of alcohol for RA. In the meantime, if you enjoy

alcoholic beverages, go ahead and have a drink or two while celebrating July the 4th.

Avoid stress, fatigue, standing on your feet for too long or spending too much time in the sun. Happy Independence Day!