Vitamin Balance Can Help You Cope With RA Symptoms

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Vitamins for Rheumatoid Arthritis

Did you know there are 100 different forms of arthritis? Also, there happens to be about 1.3 million Americans, and more than 23 million people worldwide who are affected by arthritis. The one form we are going to talk about is rheumatoid arthritis (RA), an autoimmune and autoinflammatory type of arthritis that is a long-lasting chronic disease. With an autoimmune disease like rheumatoid arthritis, the immune system goes haywire thinking that your tissues are an invader and attacks them. There are some coping and treatment techniques for this, including vitamins for rheumatoid arthritis.

In this scenario, the joints are targeted, but with rheumatoid arthritis, it can affect more than just your joints. It's not your "typical" wear-and-tear type of arthritis. Some people experience more far-reaching effects of the disease; the eyes, lungs, heart, skin and blood vessels can be affected too.

There are many conventional and alternative treatment options used by people with rheumatoid arthritis. While some have proven benefits, others are not meant to be used as a sole treatment or cure but as an add-on because of the lack of scientific research. One of those things is vitamins. In this article, we look at vitamins for rheumatoid arthritis and how they can help.

How Vitamins for Rheumatoid Arthritis Can Help

Vitamins can help a patient living with rheumatoid arthritis in various ways. However, they should never take the place of well-rounded diets and lifestyle changes, as food is the best source of nutrition.

For some people with RA, certain foods known to provide these vitamins and minerals are hard to digest or eat due to food intolerances and allergies. So, in this instance, vitamins can aid in acting as a supplementation when your body is either deficient or not able to make enough of that particular vitamin on its own through food.

This can be a beneficial route to take when medication side effects appear to leech important vitamins and minerals from the body, or if there is an imbalance of some sort. Many rheumatologists will prescribe three common vitamins: folate or folic acid, calcium and vitamin D.

Whether or not you live with a chronic disease, it can be hard to get all the vitamins and minerals you need daily. Even individuals in good health rely on supplementation to keep their bodies in a state of balance.

Which Vitamins Should I Take?

If you decide to take any of the following vitamins, know that you will need to be monitored by a medical professional. Often, your rheumatologist will order routine blood labs to see how your bodily functions are doing and there are no signs of toxicity. If there is, the vitamins will need to be stopped.

The three below are most prescribed because certain rheumatoid arthritis medications are proven to deplete these essential vitamins and minerals from a person's body.

Vitamin D

Vitamin D can be especially helpful if someone is taking corticosteroids, such as prednisone. There have been numerous studies done on the topic of vitamin D deficiency and the connection between rheumatoid arthritis, or chronic diseases of all kinds in general.

In fact, according to one study by Ther Adv Endocrinol Metab, reduced vitamin D intake has been linked to increased susceptibility to develop RA. Vitamin D also helps the body absorb calcium, which is essential for strong bones and joints. It can help with chronic pain and aches, osteoporosis or brittle bones, fatigue and weakness, improving mood, sleep and excessive sweating.

Folate or Folic Acid

Folate or folic acid is almost always prescribed when a person is taking the DMARD (disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drug), methotrexate. Folate is known as B12 and folic acid is referred to as B9; both have different names but do the same thing.

Folate is a generic name and folic acid is a manmade version sold as a supplement. Folate, though, is the most prescribed vitamin of the two.

Vitamin B12 can help reduce the amino acid homocysteine, which appears to be found in high levels of those with rheumatoid arthritis and increases with age. It helps ward off birth defects, certain cancers, and aids the brain, nervous system, red blood cells, and overall energy. Vitamin B deviancies are prevalent in those with RA too.

Calcium

This is another prescribed vitamin when a patient is on corticosteroids. Many doctors will advise getting calcium from food sources, such as a diary or dark leafy greens. However, being on corticosteroids long-term can be harmful to bone health and may lead to osteopenia or osteoporosis in some people. Therefore, additional calcium sources are important.

There are other vitamins people with RA can take but they may not be for every patient. Any vitamin regime will need to be discussed with your doctor, regardless of if they are common or not. This includes but is not limited to omega 3 fatty acids found in fish oil, vitamin K, green tea, ginger and various probiotics.

Vitamins to Avoid

There seems to be some conflicting evidence when it comes down to which vitamins to avoid with rheumatoid arthritis.

Some supplements have been tested and proven to be bad for liver health though, which is dangerous if you are taking medications for RA that also impact the liver. Some of these include kombucha tea, arnica, chapparal and cat's claw.

When to Speak to Your Doctor

The rule of thumb is to not assume that vitamins or supplements are safe or effective when it comes to treating RA. The best time to speak to your doctor about vitamins is right away.

If possible, see a physician who is skilled in alternative medicine to help guide you and your rheumatologist for your care.

Lastly, working with a nutritionist or dietician can assist you in making improvements towards a healthier more well-rounded lifestyle if needed.