Habits and Triggers That May Worsen Your Rheumatoid Arthritis

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RA Triggers to Avoid

It's been said that our habits can make or break us; our habits are activities we do constantly, and anything done repeatedly in excess can trigger health consequences. If you've been diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis, you may be engaging in habits that are acting as RA triggers — and some of these triggers may not be entirely obvious and possibly surprising. But when you are living with RA, any small and relatively simple changes you can make to your lifestyle that may help reduce pain are welcome ones.

Eating and Chewing on Ice Cubes

Eating and chewing on ice cubes, for example, feels wonderful on a hot day. However, if done repeatedly, you may crack dental work according to dentists. Sure, it does feel good when the temperature outside is over 100 degrees. However, dental materials do not respond well to cold temperature and can become weak and brittle. Chewing on ice cubes once may not break a tooth, but the habit of continually chewing ice can create health issues that require emergency intervention. Instead, you can find many other ways to cool down on a hot day.

Procrastinating on Dental Cleanings

Everyone postpones things that don't seem immediately relevant during stressful times in their lives. If you have a dental appointment on your schedule and you're under a lot of stress or in a period of chaos, do not cancel your appointment! By delaying dental cleanings, you'll increase the amount of bacteria in your mouth. It is possible for these types of oral bacterial to make their way into the bloodstream. Once in the circulatory system, the bacteria may travel to your joints (which are already affected by RA), and contribute to the exacerbation of inflammation, infection and destruction of the joints. Studies have also found a link between periodontal disease and the hardening of arteries; so, stick to your regular schedule of dental cleanings. You may even decide to have your teeth cleaned more often, once every two to three months instead of once every six months, for example.

Wearing High Heels

Rheumatoid arthritis affects the metatarsal joints of the feet, so it's important to protect these delicate joints at all costs; do not give them extra stress. Wearing high heels, for example, places stress on the balls of the feet, exactly where these metatarsal joints are located. This stresses these joints and therefore it's not a good idea to wear high heels if you have rheumatoid arthritis. Instead, opt for flat, comfortable shoes with good support. Simply changing the shoes you wear could potentially save you from some inflammation and pain.

Using a Big Fluffy Pillow

A big fluffy pillow on the bed sure does look inviting, but it also serves a practical purpose. Your neck has a C-shape, which doesn't match a pillow. A pillow will change the angle of the neck, which subsequently alters the

C1-C2 vertebrae alignment. This is a potential problem for those with rheumatoid arthritis, as the disease targets the upper cervical joints. It’s not uncommon for the upper cervical joints to be misaligned simply because someone has RA, and a big, fluffy pillow will hasten this process. Therefore, its best to avoid using a really big, elevated pillow. Use a flat pillow instead, and take your pillow with you to the chiropractor to determine if it fits and matches the curve of your neck.

Ignoring and Poorly Managing Stress

The connection between stress and rheumatoid arthritis, as well as the affect of stress on RA symptoms has been well established. Stress is often responsible for triggering RA flare-ups. Sometimes when life gets busy and hectic, with a thousand different priorities to juggle, it can be tempting to get into the habit of ignoring stress and "just dealing with it". Even though this is not a healthy way for anyone to manage and work through stress, if you have RA, this habit could be causing you extra pain by triggering flare-ups. Therefore, it is very important to find effective methods to manage your stress levels, in a way that is both healthy and works for you. You can learn more about the various ways in which you can successfully manage the symptoms of RA and stress, here.

RA Triggers: The Bottom Line

These habits are easy to break. When you do eliminate them, remember you are reducing triggers of your RA and extending the time you’ll feel well and healthy. This makes it well worth the time and effort spent identifying and addressing these potentially harmful habits.