

# ARTHRITIS ACTION

*Written by Joan Dobbie*

Have you recently learned that you are one of four million Canadians—15 per cent of the population—with joint problems? This number is expected to reach 18 per cent by the year 2020.

Arthritis usually leads to restriction of physical activity, increasing the risks of heart disease, obesity, osteoporosis and depression.

The medical establishment believes that osteoarthritis is irreversible and recommends that patients take pain killers and nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as ibuprofen and naproxen. At best, these drugs only provide temporary relief and may lead to further deterioration of the joint and surrounding tissue. They inhibit the formation of cartilage, which helps to cushion the joints. The long term use of NSAIDs, including aspirin, may lead to stomach ulcers, gastrointestinal bleeding, kidney damage and toxicity to auditory nerve cells.

The downside of drug therapy is a hard pill to swallow. However, there are alternatives. Natural therapies based on lifestyle and diet changes can be beneficial by addressing the cause of arthritis, not just the symptoms.

## *Eat for Joint Health*

Eliminating acid forming foods from the diet will help the joints to recover. Examples of acidic foods are those high in fat or sugar. Fatty meats and dairy foods increase the production of prostaglandins that inflame the joints. Foods that are high in refined sugar and bad fat must be eliminated as they will inflame the joints. Nightshade vegetables (including tomatoes, potatoes, peppers and eggplant) should be avoided. Other foods to eliminate are salty or spicy foods, chocolate, caffeine and pop.

Be sure your diet includes plenty of antioxidant foods such as fresh, raw organic vegetables and fruit, grains and legumes. These contain carotenoids, flavonoids and vitamin C—all excellent anti-inflammatory agents. Vitamin C is particularly important, as it is necessary for the formation of collagen, cartilage and bones and is essential for the growth and repair of all the tissues in the body.

Remember to include the essential fatty acids that help reduce the inflammatory response. These include omega-3 fatty acids, derived from cold-water fish such as salmon, halibut, tuna and mackerel and fresh, unrefined, cold-pressed flax oil. If you don't enjoy fish, try supplementing with fish oil or fish oil capsules.

Mild to moderate exercise also has a place in maintaining healthy joints. Swimming and walking help to stabilize joints by increasing muscular strength and controlling weight. Excess weight can result in small tears in the cartilage upon impact. A weight loss of seven kilograms can lead to a 50 per cent decline in pain in postmenopausal women as was reported in a recent study from the University of Maryland School of Medicine.

---

# ARTHRITIS ACTION

---

## *Building a Foundation*

Glucosamine is found in connective tissue throughout the body, including the skin, lining of the gastrointestinal tract, arteries and veins.

Glucosamine is a natural alternative to NSAIDs. It is an amino sugar that helps to form cartilage tissue. Glucosamine repairs and regenerates damaged ligaments, cartilage and tendons over time. In double blind studies, people suffering with chronic knee pain and stiffness benefited from taking 1,000 mg to 1,500 mg of glucosamine per day. Pain and stiffness in the knees and small joints will decrease faster than in the hips.

Glucosamine is commonly in tablet form, but can also be taken in an easily assimilated liquid form. Supplemental glucosamine is often derived from the shells of lobster, crab and shrimp. It is well tolerated by most people but about 12 per cent reported the following side effects: heartburn, nausea, diarrhea, hives and itching. The side effects disappeared a few days after discontinuing the glucosamine treatment.

Dietary supplements take longer to work than NSAIDs. However, some people notice significant pain relief with one to two weeks, especially when a liquid glucosamine is taken in combination with herbal extracts in the correct therapeutic dosage.

## *Tried and True Herbs*

Devil's claw root is recognized as a powerful anti-inflammatory. It is used to relieve the pain of rheumatism, arthritis, gout, myalgia (muscle pain), lumbago (lower back pain) and to reduce swelling and inflammation, especially around the joints. This bitter root contains saponins, which help to eliminate endotoxins from the joints.

Nettle, commonly grown in North America, offers a cleansing, detoxifying and diuretic action for the whole body, due to its flavonoids and high potassium content. When taken with glucosamine and devil's claw root, it will relieve arthritic pain and stiffness. Nettle can be cooked as a vegetable and tastes like spinach.

Those with arthritis will appreciate the wonderful pain relieving properties offered by feverfew, a natural herb. This herb is not only an analgesic because of the parthenolide contained in the leaves. It is also an anti-inflammatory and antirheumatic. Do not take feverfew if taking warfarin or other blood-thinning drugs.

Joan Dobbie is a retired medical laboratory technologist with a personal interest in osteoarthritis.

## *References*

- Sahelian, Ray, MD. *All About Glucosamine and Chondroitin*. New York, 1998.  
Mowrey, Daniel, PhD. *Herbal Tonic Therapies*. 1993.