

Treating Arthritis Naturally

By Dr. Zoltan P. Rona, M.D., M.Sc.

About 50 million North Americans (approximately one in seven people) have some form of arthritis. In another 20 years, as baby boomers grow older and people live longer, close to 70 million people in Canada and the United States will have arthritis.

Arthritis means inflammation of a joint. The most common conditions are osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, gout, lupus and ankylosing spondylitis. Severity can range from mild to crippling and may even be life threatening in certain cases.

Causes of Arthritis

A family history of arthritis appears to play a part in the disease, but the exact mechanisms are still a mystery. The wear and tear of aging and previous joint damage or injury is specifically associated with osteoarthritis. Another potential cause of osteoarthritis, and of rheumatoid arthritis, is a deficiency of hydrochloric acid produced by the stomach. Released in digestion, this acid helps us to absorb the minerals we need for healthy bones and joints. Mineral deficiencies can either cause or worsen just about any type of arthritis. Calcium, magnesium, zinc, copper, manganese, silicon, sulfur, boron, strontium and numerous other lesser-known minerals are involved in bone synthesis, breakdown and repair.

We have all been brainwashed about the importance of fluoride for dental health but studies indicate that fluoride, at levels as low as one part-per-million in drinking water, can cause osteoarthritis by breaking down collagen, the mesh-like protein in bone and other connective tissue. A deficiency of vitamin D may cause loss of cartilage and degenerative bony spur formation, which are linked to increased risk for osteoarthritis progression.

Food allergies may be a hidden cause of chronic inflammation in a joint and are linked with immune system dysfunction like rheumatoid arthritis. Food allergies are also linked to leaky gut syndrome – damage to the gut lining that allows large protein molecules to be absorbed. As the immune system treats the molecules as foreign substances and starts making antibodies, joint inflammation may result. Another source of immune system inflammation is mercury fillings, which leak mercury vapor into the body on a daily basis.

Known food allergies and foods that are “pro-inflammatory”, such as red meat, unhealthy fats, sugar, caffeine, and wheat, to name a few, may worsen or cause symptoms and should be eliminated. Members of the nightshade family (tomatoes, potatoes, peppers, eggplants, and tobacco) might have to be eliminated by some sensitive individuals.

Yeast, fungi and their mycotoxins initiate many autoimmune diseases involving joint inflammation. Parasites and unfriendly bacteria can compete with your body for nutrients like vitamins, minerals and amino acids. They can also secrete waste products into your gut and bloodstream that are capable of causing various allergic or autoimmune reactions.

The Arthritis Diet

Pro-inflammatory foods and known food allergies should be eliminated. These most often include beef, pork and fried foods, sugar and refined carbohydrates in any form, coffee, regular tea and alcohol, dairy products, corn, yeast, all citrus and gluten-containing grains, especially wheat, rye, oats and barley. Nightshade foods (tomatoes, potatoes, peppers, eggplants, tobacco) might have to be eliminated by some sensitive individuals. Foods, like fish, flax and hempseed, are anti-inflammatory in that they have the reverse effect. For more detailed information on diet, see my two books on rheumatoid arthritis and osteoarthritis by Alive books.



Supplements to help relieve arthritis (in order of importance)

We are all biochemically unique, and consequently no single regimen will work equally well for one and all. One or some combination of the following nutritional supplements is generally effective for most people afflicted with arthritis.

- **Omega-3 Fatty Acids:** Long before supplements like glucosamine sulfate became household names for reversing osteoarthritis, millions of people found great relief from joint pain, stiffness and reduced range of motion by swallowing with daily cod liver oil. Cod liver oil, halibut liver oil, krill oil, seal oil, salmon oil and shark liver oil all contain fats that stimulate the body to manufacture anti-inflammatory hormones called prostaglandins. These fats referred to as eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) are found in large amounts in cold water fish (trout, salmon, cod, halibut, mackerel, catfish, shark, etc.), and are highly effective as a natural anti-inflammatory agent. Good results can be anticipated in three to six months. When combined with glucosamine sulfate osteoarthritis can be significantly improved within six weeks or less.
- **Glucosamine Sulfate:** Glucosamine is the building block of articular cartilage. Numerous double-blind studies done in the 1980s concluded that supplementation reverses osteoarthritis, and other studies show it to be superior in pain relief to ibuprofen and NSAIDs. Glucosamine is required for the synthesis of glycosaminoglycans, which aid in the repair of the cartilage destroyed by arthritis.

Glucosamine supplementation has produced a 95% response rate in patients compared to 72% in patients taking nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs. Glucosamine sulfate has been the drug of choice for treatment of osteoarthritis in Portugal, Spain and Italy since the early 1980s. Shark, cow and chicken cartilage are other sources of glycosaminoglycans but may be more expensive than glucosamine sulfate therapy.

“There is such a treatment that inhibits the degradation and actually starts rebuilding the cartilage, costs less, does not require a prescription, does not make the osteo-arthritis worse by further destroying the cartilage, and does not have all of the extremely dangerous side effects of NSAIDs [e.g. ibuprofen and other drugs which can cause nausea and even hemorrhaging] This substance is glucosamine sulfate.”

*Sherry A. Rogers, M.D., Health Counselor,
“Osteoarthritis is Repairable” v8, no3, p55-6, 1997.*

“We spend billions each year treating joint pain with steroids and analgesics, but those drugs don’t repair the damage, and their side effects can be deadly. The new regimen won’t work for everyone, and it’s sure to fail in people with advanced disease, since they lack cartilage to restore. But if half the people now lining up for the stuff respond to it, arthritis treatment will never be the same.”

Newsweek, The Arthritis Cure? February 17, 1997, p54

Glucosamine helps bind water in the cartilage matrix and has been shown to help produce more collagen. It normalizes cartilage metabolism, the substance that helps to keep the cartilage from breaking down. Glucosamine can also improve joint function and help reduce the pain of those suffering from osteoarthritis. Double-blind studies show that glucosamine sulfate helps symptoms such as joint tenderness, pain on standing, pain on walking and joint swelling.

Numerous double-blind studies done in the 1980s concluded that supplementation with glucosamine sulfate reverses osteoarthritis. Glucosamine may speed healing of recurrent joint injuries such as chondromalacia patella and thus prevent the development of osteoarthritis.

- **Methyl Sulfonylurea Methane (MSM):** MSM is a natural form of organic sulfur, a critical component of the amino acids methionine, cysteine and cystine contained in the cellular proteins of all living organisms. Next to salt and water, MSM is the third largest ingredient found in the body. Sulfur is needed for the proteins of hair, nails and skin as well as glutathione, one of the body’s most important antioxidants. MSM is present in raw fruits, vegetables and some grains but is commonly lost during cooking, food processing and storage.

MSM is an odorless and stable metabolite of DMSO, a compound used in conventional medicine to treat scleroderma and chronic urinary bladder inflammation (interstitial cystitis).



DMSO was a short-lived fad treatment for arthritis and other sports related injuries (tendinitis, sprains, strains and non-specific musculoskeletal pain). The drawback to DMSO therapy was that it gave users a powerful garlic breath odor. When DMSO was applied to the skin, it rapidly absorbed into the circulation and provided pain relief to the affected areas. The garlic odor problem, however, made its use unpopular to all but the most motivated to take this unusual remedy. MSM is as powerful in its effects as DMSO but there is no offensive odor.

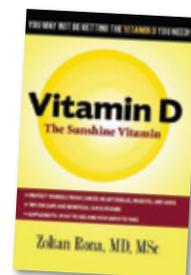
A deficiency of MSM can result in fatigue and an increased susceptibility to arthritis. Long used in veterinary medicine as a supplement to control arthritic pain, MSM also has proven therapeutic benefits in humans. MSM is also effective in controlling symptoms from allergies and is a natural anti-parasitic nutrient. It can also help the body offset the harmful effects of toxic heavy metals such as mercury, lead, cadmium and arsenic.



- **Vitamin D:** This hormone like nutrient comes primarily through the effects of sunshine on the skin and plays an essential role in calcium metabolism. It is strongly anti-inflammatory. Thus, daily intake of vitamin D is an effective treatment for all types of arthritis.
- **Turmeric:** The yellow pigment of the herb turmeric is called curcumin. In some studies it has been reported to be equally effective as cortisone without any of the associated side effects. Curcumin also has powerful anti-cancer effects and protects the liver from damage from various toxins from the environment.
- **Boswellia Serrata:** Boswellia is an herb native to India with well proven anti-arthritic effects through the inhibition of inflammatory mediators, prevention of decreased cartilage formation and improved blood supply to the joints. Boswellia contains boswellic acids, which have been shown to be responsible for the tissue-protective actions, the inhibition of leukotrienes, a class of mediators of the body's inflammatory response.
- **Devil's Claw (*Harpagophytum procumbens*):** Devil's claw root is a South African plant observed to have an action comparable to that of an NSAID (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug) in several European studies.
- **Hyaluronic Acid:** This is an important lubricating component of synovial fluid found in all joints. Deficiency can lead to a loss of cushioning needed to prevent pain and inflammation.
- **Boron:** Boron is essential to the body's synthesis of steroid hormones and vitamin D, both of which are vital for normal bone growth and repair.

Dr. Zoltan P. Rona practises Complementary Medicine in Toronto and is the medical editor of "The Encyclopedia of Natural Healing." He has also published several Canadian best-selling books, including "Return to The Joy of Health" and "Vitamin D - The Sunshine Vitamin." For more of his articles, see www.mydoctor.ca/drzoltanrona

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ARTHRITIS? JOINT PAIN?



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Recommended by Dr. Zoltan Rona

- Helps to relieve the pain associated with osteoarthritis
- Helps to maintain healthy joints and cartilage
- Helps in the development and maintenance of bones and teeth
- Helps in the absorption and use of calcium & phosphorus



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