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5 Superfoods for Arthritis

Ease the ache and reduce inflammation by adding these standouts to your diet

by Barbara Brody, **AARP** (<http://www.aarp.org>), July 20, 2021 | Comments: 10



[En español \(/espanol/salud/vida-saludable/info-2021/superalimentos-para-la-artritis.html?intcmp=AE-HLTH-TOSPA-TOGL-ES\)](#). | If your hips, knees or hands have gotten stiffer and more painful in recent years, you might be among the more than 32 million Americans who suffer from osteoarthritis (OA). This degenerative joint condition, often described as the “wear and tear” form of arthritis, causes the cartilage that normally cushions joints to break down, allowing bone to rub against bone. The result: pain, redness, stiffness and inflammation.

This kind of [arthritis \(/health/conditions-treatments/info-2020/arthritis-symptoms.html\)](#) is mainly treated by pain-relieving medications, but lifestyle changes can also help a lot. Exercise and weight loss tend to be top of the list. Regularly moving the impacted joint helps stretch and strengthen the muscles surrounding it, which can ease stiffness and promote mobility. If you're overweight, shedding a few pounds will help take some strain off a weight-bearing joint (like your knee or hip), as well as reduce the amount of inflammatory proteins that are naturally produced by fat cells.

Dietary changes are, of course, the key to losing weight, but tweaking your eating habits can also help control arthritis symptoms. That's because while osteoarthritis is primarily caused by overstressing one or more joints, “there's also a component that has to do with the body's response to injury, which is inflammation,” says Melissa Ann Prest, a registered dietician and spokesperson for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. She points to the Mediterranean and DASH diets, which limit added sugar, refined carbohydrates and saturated fat, as anti-inflammatory standouts.

Whether you follow a specific diet plan or not, regularly adding the following foods to your plate (while simultaneously cutting back on fried food and sweets) might help soothe your achy joints and perhaps even slow down the progression of arthritis.

Superfood No 1. Salmon

Oily [fish \(/health/healthy-living/info-2021/easy-fish-recipes.html\)](#), like salmon are rich in inflammation-fighting omega-3 fatty acids, which may help curtail OA symptoms, says Toby Amidor, a registered dietician and author of *The Family Immunity Cookbook* (October 2021). Salmon contains both EPA and DHA, two types of omega-3s that are found in all the cells of the body, she explains.

Bonus: Eating fatty fish might help people with autoimmune forms of arthritis, including rheumatoid arthritis, better manage their condition. The American Heart Association also recommends eating fish twice a week to protect your heart.

Not a fish fan? Chia seeds are the best plant-based source of omega-3s, and they're also a good source of protein and fiber.

Superfood No. 2. Olive oil

Extra-virgin olive oil doesn't have many omega-3s, but it does contain other unsaturated fats that similarly help quiet inflammation in the body, says Prest. This flavorful oil might even help slow the deterioration of cartilage in people with osteoarthritis, according to a research review published in *Nutrients*.

Perhaps most exciting for arthritis patients, however, is the fact that olive oil contains a compound called oleocanthal. Scientists have determined that oleocanthal has a mechanism of action that's similar to the way [NSAIDs like ibuprofen and naproxen \(/health/drugs-supplements/info-2021/pain-reliever-risks.html\)](/health/drugs-supplements/info-2021/pain-reliever-risks.html) work to ease pain. While no one is suggesting that you can toss your pills if you indulge in spaghetti aglio e olio (spaghetti with garlic and oil) more often, swapping saturated fats like butter for olive oil should help decrease inflammation throughout your body and might make your osteoarthritis more tolerable. (Plus, it's better for your heart.)



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Superfood No. 3. Cherries

The ruby red hue is a hint that sweet cherries are packed with anthocyanins, potent antioxidants that are also found in blueberries and raspberries. Anthocyanins “may help minimize oxidation and oxidative stress that contribute to inflammation,” including in your joints, says Amidor.

Some research also suggests that cherry consumption might decrease levels of C-reactive protein, an inflammatory protein that's associated with autoimmune forms of arthritis (like rheumatoid arthritis), as well as OA.

Superfood No. 4. Garlic

This pungent vegetable in the allium family is often touted for its ability to help ward off cancer, heart disease and the common cold. There's also reason to believe that it might reduce the risk of osteoarthritis. In one study, published in *BMC Musculoskeletal Disorders*, researchers determined that people who ate more alliums (including garlic, leeks, shallots and onions) were significantly less likely to develop hip OA.

The protective effect of garlic likely comes thanks to diallyl disulfide, a compound that appears to combat inflammatory cytokines (proteins) that would otherwise threaten to damage cartilage.

Superfood No. 5. Spinach and kale

These leafy greens are loaded with [vitamin K \(/health/drugs-supplements/info-2021/vitamin-k.html\)](/health/drugs-supplements/info-2021/vitamin-k.html), which research suggests is important for cartilage health, says Prest. That might explain why observational studies have found that older adults who don't get enough K, which also plays a role in strengthening bones and helping blood to clot, are more apt to develop OA. Some scientists believe that vitamin K helps with arthritis by preventing the cartilage from calcifying (hardening).

While adding more spinach and kale to your diet will also give you a boost of folate, vitamin C, vitamin A and calcium, don't rapidly up your intake if you take a blood-thinning drug like warfarin (Coumadin). The vitamin K in these greens can counteract the impact of your blood thinner, so be sure to check with your doctor before making any major dietary changes.

More on Healthy Eating

- [Superfoods for adult health \(/health/healthy-living/info-2021/superfoods-for-adult-health.html\)](/health/healthy-living/info-2021/superfoods-for-adult-health.html)
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