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by Karolyn A. Gazella
Arthritis is a painful condition that affects millions of people. In fact, one new case of arthritis is diagnosed in the United States every 33 seconds. It is estimated that almost everyone over age 60 has some form of osteoarthritis.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) warns that by the year 2020, the number of people with arthritis will increase by 57 percent, and the number of people with arthritis-related limitation of activities will go up by 66 percent. As soon as the year 2000, arthritis is expected to add more than \$95 billion to the United States' annual healthcare costs. As it is, arthritis currently accounts for more than 26 million lost work days each year.

Yes, arthritis can be a devastating condition. A simple task like climbing stairs becomes monumental, and in some cases, nearly impossible. Routine activities such as driving, shopping, or even writing a letter become increasingly difficult.

Even worse, conventional medicine has all but ignored this increasing epidemic, offering only drugs to ease the pain and surgery to replace damaged joints. Sadly, studies have shown the most commonly prescribed drugs for arthritis (known as nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, or NSAIDs) actually make the problem worse by blocking cartilage repair and speeding up cartilage destruction. Although NSAIDs

provide immediate relief, they actually make arthritis worse. The result is a vicious cycle of constant NSAID usage.

In addition, NSAIDs have been associated with several adverse side effects: dizziness, nausea, ringing in the ears, constipation, possible kidney damage, and peptic ulcers. In fact, naturopath and author Michael T. Murray, N.D., asserts that more people die each year as a result of peptic ulcers caused by NSAIDs than from cocaine abuse. Fortunately, there are much safer, more effective answers.

What is arthritis?

There are more than 100 varieties of arthritis. The two most common forms are rheumatoid arthritis and osteoarthritis.

"Rheumatoid arthritis is a chronic inflammatory condition that affects the entire body, but especially the synovial membranes of the joints," according to an article in *The American Journal of Natural Medicine*, by Dr. Murray. "It is a classic example of an autoimmune disease, a condition in which the body's immune system attacks the body's own tissue."

Rheumatoid arthritis develops in about one percent of the population, affecting women two to three times more often than men, according to



The Merck Manual of Medical Information, from Merck Research Laboratories. Usually, this form of arthritis first emerges between the ages of 25 and 50, but symptoms can appear at any age.

Osteoarthritis is much more wide-spread. Also known as degenerative joint disease, osteoarthritis occurs when the cartilage in the joints becomes worn or damaged. Surveys indicate that 80 percent of people

over the age of 50 have some degree of osteoarthritis. Under the age of 45, it is much more common in men. After the age of 45, it is 10 times more common in women, according to *Natural Alternatives to Over-the-Counter and Prescription Drugs*, by Dr. Murray.

Causes of osteoarthritis can include genetic predisposition, nutritional deficiencies, an injury to the joint, or simply aging. Years of use can wear down the joint structure, specifically joint cartilage, resulting in osteoarthritis. In addition, it is believed that as we age, we have a decreased ability to repair joint cartilage and an increase in joint erosion.

Specifically, with aging, there is a decreased ability to restore and manufacture normal joint structures like cartilage, explains Dr. Murray. "As we age, the number as well as the activity of important repair enzymes is greatly reduced, making joint

structures especially prone to damage."

Does this mean osteoarthritis is inevitable? Absolutely not! Focusing on prevention is the first step in dealing with osteoarthritis. Recognize the key symptoms, which include:

- Early morning stiffness
- Recurring pain and tenderness of the joint (s)
- Limited joint movement
- Noticeable joint pain upon movement
- Creaking and cracking of joints upon movement

Since osteoarthritis frequently affects the spine, back pain is another common symptom. In addition, joints of the fingers, base of the thumbs, neck, lower back, big toes, hips, and knees are commonly afflicted.

If osteoarthritis takes hold, you can take steps to alleviate the pain and help restore joint movement without resorting to NSAIDs.

Diet and exercise make a difference

Diet plays a huge role in your arthritis prevention and treatment plan. The foods you eat either minimize or maximize your arthritis symptoms. Choose foods that are high in vital nutrients and dietary fiber. Here are some specific dietary recommendation

Eat plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables.

Cherries, blueberries, and blackberries are especially therapeutic for all forms of arthritis because they provide important flavonoids.

Sulfur-containing foods such as garlic, onions, Brussels sprouts, and cabbage also have medicinal properties.

Eliminate foods from the nightshade family (i.e., tomatoes, potatoes, eggplant, and peppers).



They can cause arthritis symptoms in some people.

James Balch, M.D., and Phyllis Balch, C.N.C., authors of *Prescription for Nutritional Healing*, provide this additional dietary advice: "Avoid milk...Also avoid red meat, sugar products, citrus fruits, paprika, cayenne pepper, tobacco, and salt."

"The types of foods we eat influence the composition of every cell in our body, explains medical research writer Ray Sahelian, M.D. "Restrict your consumption of processed, high-calorie, high-sugar, high-fat foods and instead substitute a variety of fresh fruits, grains, legumes, and vegetables to obtain the hundreds of carotenoids and flavonoids that act as antioxidants and anti inflammatory agents."

The successful "anti-arthritis" diet also features ways to maintain a healthy weight. Obesity maybe a significant risk factor in the development of osteoarthritis. Research at the University of Michigan found that people who were 20 percent or more overweight were also three times more likely than slimmer people to have arthritis of the hands, and their arthritis symptoms were more severe, reports the *PDR Family Guide to Nutrition and Health*, from Medical Economics.

"Weight loss reduces stress on afflicted joints," reports the American College of Rheumatology. "Studies have shown that overweight persons may be able to reduce the risk for developing osteoarthritis or the severity of its symptoms by losing weight."

Most experts recommend consistent exercise. Stretching, strengthening, and postural exercises can support healthy cartilage, increase a joint's range of motion, and build surrounding muscles so they absorb shock more effectively.

Physical therapists, naturopathic physicians, and chiropractors utilize a variety of non-drug methods to help ease the pain of arthritis. In addition, using straight-

backed chairs, firm mattresses, and bed boards is often recommended.

Glucosamine and chondroitin sulfate: Nature's arthritis cure?

In contrast to NSAIDs, specific natural substances can help repair damaged joint cartilage and prevent joint erosion. Showing the most promise as an arthritis cure is the natural combination of glucosamine and chondroitin sulfate.

Glucosamine occurs naturally in the human body. Supplemental glucosamine works by triggering the production of the key elements in cartilage. It also helps the body

“Glucosamine
 along with a proper diet, weight loss, and other natural supplements should be considered as first-line therapy in the treatment of **osteoarthritis.”**

repair damaged cartilage. In addition, several studies have indicated that glucosamine reduces pain and improves joint function in arthritis sufferers. Best of all, it is extremely safe.

Thousands of people have participated in hundreds of studies throughout the world, showing that glucosamine is superior to NSAIDs in the



treatment of osteoarthritis.

"Glucosamine — along with a proper diet, weight loss, and other natural supplements — should be considered as first-line therapy in the treatment of osteoarthritis," explains Dr. Sahelian, M.D., in his booklet, *Glucosamine: Nature's Arthritis Remedy*. "It is better tolerated than the current medicines used for osteoarthritis, such as NSAIDs, whose regular use may even cause progressive damage to cartilage tissue.

The recommended dosage of glucosamine sulfate for osteoarthritis is 1,500 mg daily. Dr. Sahelian says most individuals experience at least partial relief within one to four months.

While many studies have shown the effectiveness of glucosamine in osteoarthritis, researchers are now testing the substance when combined with chondroitin sulfate. "I would say about 60 percent (of my patients) benefit from glucosamine (sulfate) therapy. No side effects have been reported," says New York physician Steven Bock, M.D. "When I add chondroitin to the glucosamine, some patients report a slight additional benefit."

Chondroitin sulfate draws fluid into proteoglycan molecules, an important component of cartilage. As a "liquid magnet," chondroitin sulfate increases the shock-absorbing activity of cartilage. It also pulls more nutrients into the cartilage, thus nourishing the joints. This combination is catching on, as indicated by brisk sales of the book *The Arthritis Cure*, by Jason Theodosakis, M.D. "By itself, each supplement is effective," explains the author. "Together, they may well be the answer for millions of people suffering from osteoarthritis, the solution that works where drugs and surgeries have failed."

Glucosamine sulfate is the form of glucosamine studied in most of the clinical trials. However, glucosamine hydrochloride is also showing great promise as a powerful anti-arthritis compound, and researchers are giving it more attention. Furthermore, glucosamine hydrochloride is much more economical than glucosamine sulfate. *The Arthritis Cure* points

out, "Although the sulfate form is used most often, other forms may work just as well."

Other joint-protective compounds

In addition to proper dietary and lifestyle factors, and glucosamine and chondroitin sulfate, other natural substances can provide relief and help prevent osteoarthritis. Most experts advise taking a high-quality multivitamin/mineral supplement along with a comprehensive antioxidant formula. Vitamins C and E used in combination, for example, are important antioxidants that help protect cartilage tissue. Vitamin E is also credited with membrane-stabilizing properties.

Be sure the multivitamin/mineral supplement contains calcium and magnesium, which are important minerals for bone health. Drugs often given to patients with arthritis can deplete the body's stores of calcium, explains the *PDR @ Family Guide to Nutrition and Health*, from Medical Economics.

According to Dr. Sahelian's booklet on glucosamine, Dr. McAlindon of Boston University Medical Center confirms that high doses of antioxidant nutrients, specifically vitamin C, reduce the progression of osteoarthritis. "High intake of antioxidant micronutrients, especially vitamin C, may reduce the risk of cartilage loss and disease progression in people with osteoarthritis," concludes Dr. McAlindon.

Dr. Murray points out that white blood cell and plasma concentrations of vitamin C are significantly decreased in arthritis patients. This indicates an increased need for this nutrient.

In addition, an herb from India, known as boswellia, and an extract of devil's claw have been used historically to treat arthritis. The potent anti-inflammatory action of devil's claw has been compared with cortisone. It appears to be more effective for osteoarthritis than rheumatoid arthritis.

White willow bark, which is often called "Nature's Aspirin," also helps relieve the pain associated with arthritis. In addition, it is reported

to have anti-rheumatic and anti-inflammatory properties.

Suffer no more!

Arthritis is a painful condition. Fortunately, with proper dietary and lifestyle changes, as well as nutritional supplements containing glucosamine and chondroitin sulfate, osteoarthritis can be prevented and even reversed.

Don't let arthritis pain get the best of you. Take back your life! Climb those stairs, walk in the sunshine, write those letters, and even play a round of golf (without a cart!). You don't have to suffer any longer.

Watch What you eat

To minimize arthritis symptoms, be sure to eliminate or cut down on your intake of these top 10 arthritis-aggravating foods and beverages:

1. corn
2. wheat
3. bacon/pork
4. oranges
5. milk
6. oats
7. rye
8. eggs
9. beef
10. Coffee

Source: Pool: Your Miracle Medicine, by Jean Carper (Harper Collins", 1993)