Natural medicine for arthritis

Tracing the causes of arthritis is a bit of a detective game. Here are some clues to help you eliminate suspects and enhance relief.

Zoltan Rona, MD

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Causes of arthritis: usual and unusual suspects

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 are specifically associated with osteoarthritis. Another potential cause of osteoarthritis, and of rheumatoid arthritis, is a deficiency of hydrochloric acid. Released in digestion, this acid helps us to absorb the minerals we need for healthy bones.

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Arthritis supplements

Omega-3 fatty acids
Cod liver oil, herring oil, halibut liver oil, hempseed oil, and shark liver oil all contain fats that stimulate the body to manufacture anti-inflammatory hormones. Dosage: nine to 12 grams daily of capsules, or two to three tablespoons of the oil.

Niacinamide
This B vitamin (a synthetic form of niacin) may enhance glucocorticoid secretion, a naturally produced anti-inflammatory adrenal hormone. Dosage: Suggested dosage is 500 milligrams 6 times daily.

Glucosamine sulfate
Numerous double-blind studies done in the 1980s concluded that supplementation with glucosamine sulfate reverses osteoarthritis pain. Dosage: 500 mg 3 times daily.
Arthritis supplements continued

Vitamin C
Vitamin C has been proven to have an anti-inflammatory effect.
Dosage: 6,000 mg or more daily to bowel tolerance.

Vitamin E
At dosages of 800 IU daily, vitamin E may be a prostaglandin inhibitor similar to NSAIDS (nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs), but without the side-effects.
Dosage: 800 IU daily.

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.
Dosage: 6 to 9 mg daily.

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.

Another area to look for culprits is the immune system. Food allergies may be a hidden cause of chronic inflammation in a joint and are linked to 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 vapour into the body on a daily basis.

Known food allergies and foods that are "pro-inflammatory," such as red meat, unhealthy fats, sugar,
Zinc and copper
Levels of these minerals are often low in those suffering from osteoarthritis.
Dosage: zinc—30 mg, copper—4 mg, daily.

Methyl Sulfonyl Methane (MSM)
This natural form of organic sulfur is a critical component of the amino acids methionine, cysteine, and cystine, which are contained in the cellular proteins of all living organisms and have a powerful anti-inflammatory effect.
Dosage: 6 to 12 grams daily.

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 in several European studies.
Dosage: 500 mg 3 times daily with meals.

Enzymes
Plant-based digestive enzymes (bromelain, papain) and pancreatic enzymes (animal based) work as powerful anti-inflammatory agents, reducing pain, swelling, and infection while improving joint flexibility.
Dosage: 1 to 5 capsules 3 times daily (depending on potency) on empty stomach.

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.

The good guys: diet and supplements
Fish, fresh vegetables, olive oil, flax, and hempseed are desirable “anti-inflammatory” foods. One or some combination of the nutritional supplements listed in this article is also generally effective for arthritis. Because we are all biochemically unique, however, no single regimen will work equally well for everyone. A natural health care practitioner can best individualize the treatment approach for the patient.

Zoltan Rona, MD, is the best-selling author of several books, including Return to the Joy of Health (alive Books, 1995) and Natural Alternatives to Vaccinations (alive Books, 2000). Check out his new Web site at highlevelwellness.ca.