



How a Vegan Diet Can Reduce Arthritic Pain

Adhering to a vegan diet and lifestyle can not only help animals and the environment but also benefit your health. One health benefit, in particular, is a potential reduction in arthritic pain. This is largely due to the reduction of inflammatory foods, and the higher intake of anti-inflammatory plant-foods.

What Causes Inflammation?

Over 50 million adults and approximately 300,000 children have some form of arthritis, and it is the leading cause of disability in America today. So what is responsible for this overwhelming degree of joint pain?

When it comes to autoimmune and inflammatory arthritis, like rheumatoid arthritis, autoimmunity is responsible for the inflammation. The immune system is protective in nature and triggers inflammation when the body encounters a harmful pathogen or infection. However, sometimes the immune system receives a misdirected immune response, causing it to go awry, attacking the joints and the body itself. This leads to inflammatory arthritic pain. It is believed that environmental factors such as drinking and smoking, genetic factors, and diet can trigger autoimmunity.

Environmental factors and a multitude of infectious diseases can lead to the development of arthritis, but recent studies have shown a correlation between diet and inflammation. Certain foods have inflammatory properties, which trigger the immune system. Some of these foods include refined sugars, vegetable oils, saturated fats, dairy, processed meats, and fried foods. These foods are regularly consumed on the Western diet, which may make it the real culprit behind inflammation.

The Western-style diet is high in fatty meats, dairy, overly processed foods, refined

grains, sugar, and salt. When consuming an abundance of these items, it not only raises your cholesterol, but it also increases pro-inflammatory molecules in the gut. The high intake of sugar, salt, and saturated fat negatively affects microbiota composition, while also activating receptors responsible for triggering the immune system and causing that inflammatory response.

The saying, "All disease begins in the gut," couldn't hold more true to arthritic pain. When you consume an unhealthy diet, overly saturated with fat, the surface of your intestine becomes inflamed. This inflammation allows pas-



sage of dietary antigens or foreign proteins. The gut then permeates and sets of those inflammatory immune responses causing the flare up of joint pain.

If you are suffering from arthritis-induced joint pain, it is important to consume foods that will not set off these inflammatory responses.

Plant-Based Living: An Anti-Inflammatory Diet

In contrast, consuming a whole-foods, vegan diet low in saturated fat, has quite the opposite effect. A diet rich in nutrient-dense plant foods allows the immune system to work to its full potential, removing all antigens from the bloodstream. Whole, plant foods also enhance the intestinal barrier, preventing gut permeation.

In addition to supporting and protecting the immune system, plants are rich in phytochemicals and other antioxidants which help keep joints strong. Antioxidants have the ability to fight off damaging free radicals that form in the joints, further relieving inflammation. These healing phytochemicals are only found in plant foods.

Clinical studies have tested the effects of a whole foods vegan diet and found that those eating a plant-based diet had higher levels of omega-3 fatty acids than those consuming an omnivorous diet. These omega-3 fatty acids found in abundance in vegetables, legumes, and soy, were seen to increase anti-inflammatory prostaglandins, lipids that mediate the inflammatory response!

The Best Anti-Inflammatory Foods for Arthritis

If you are looking to reduce arthritic pain through nutrition, these are the top ten plant-based foods that are known to reduce inflammation.

1. **Blueberries** are rich in vitamin C and polyphenols which combat free radicals and reduce inflammation.
2. **Ginger** not only has anti-inflammatory properties but antimicrobial as well.
3. **Whole grains** reduce inflammation by lowering blood sugar.
4. **Leafy greens** are packed with flavonoids, vitamin C, and antioxidants that heal and prevent tissue damage.
5. **Turmeric** is renowned for its anti-inflammatory properties.
6. **Sweet potatoes** are high in antioxidants, beta-carotene, and manganese.
7. **Soy**, non-GMO, possesses isoflavones that combat inflammation.
8. **Green tea** is concentrated with catechin, or antioxidants that heal the body.
9. **Garlic** protects the immune system due to its sulfur compounds.
10. **Raw cacao** is not only delicious but is also loaded with antioxidants!

While proper nutrition may help relieve common symptoms, be sure to consult with your doctor or nutritionist before making any drastic changes to your diet.

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