

Nutrition and Arthritis

www.arthritis.org.nz



**ARTHRITIS
NEW ZEALAND**

KAIPONAPONA AOTEAROA

*Improving the lives of
people affected by arthritis*

*Te whai kia pai ake te hunga
kua pāngia e te kaiponapona*

Did you know?

- A healthy diet can **help you manage your arthritis** as well as **reduce your risk** of other chronic conditions such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease, certain types of cancer and osteoporosis.
- It can **help to protect you** against some potential side-effects of drugs.
- If you are overweight and have osteoarthritis, even a small weight loss **can greatly improve your mobility and health.**

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What is a healthy diet?

A healthy diet is the key to better health. Aim to reduce the amount of fat, salt and sugar that you eat and drink. Most New Zealanders don't eat enough wholegrains, vegetables and fruit. A good diet includes choices from each of the four food groups:

- Vegetables and fruit
- Wholegrain bread and cereals
- Milk and milk products (reduced fat products are a better choice for most people)
- Lean meats, poultry, fish, eggs.

The New Zealand Ministry of Health recommends that we eat at least five portions of vegetables and fruit every day. Choose colourful vegetables and fruit as these are rich in protective substances known as antioxidants as well as vitamins.

Aim to eat oily fish such as kahawai, tuna, salmon, sardines, herring and mackerel at least twice a week. Current evidence suggests that omega-3 fatty acids found in oily fish are likely to be beneficial if you have an inflammatory type of arthritis.



Why is my weight so important?

The most important link between your diet and arthritis is your weight. Being overweight puts an extra burden on your weight-bearing joints (back, hips, knees, ankles and feet) when they are already damaged or under strain. Because of the way joints work, when you walk, the weight of the load your knees must support is more than your body weight. If you are overweight and have arthritis in any of your weight-bearing joints, losing weight will help you more than any food supplements. Talk to your doctor or dietitian about the best diet for you to lose weight.

On the other hand, some people with rheumatoid arthritis may struggle to maintain a healthy weight. Small frequent meals (five or six a day) will help avoid undesirable weight loss. Also increasing your intake of food high in healthy fats (mono and polyunsaturated fat) may help, for example oily fish, avocado, nuts, olives, and oils.

If you are overweight and have arthritis in any of your weight-bearing joints, losing weight will help you more than any food supplements.





Can changing diet help my arthritis?

Gout is the only type of arthritis that can be substantially improved by changing your diet and lifestyle. Choose small servings of meat, chicken and seafood. Enjoy low fat dairy foods every day. Drink less alcohol (beer) and fizzy drinks. Drink plenty of water.

Refer to www.arthritis.org.nz for more advice on gout.

Do I need to avoid any specific foods?

Some people feel that cutting out ‘acidic fruit’ such as oranges and grapefruit and vegetables from the so-called nightshade family (potatoes, tomatoes, sweet and hot peppers and eggplants) helps arthritis. There is no scientific evidence that leaving out either of these foods does help, and such diets may have the undesired effect of reducing beneficial nutrients.

There is some evidence that a vegetarian diet is helpful for some people with inflammatory arthritis. If you decide to try this, it can become difficult to obtain sufficient energy, protein and minerals (e.g. iron and calcium) from your food and it would be best to have personalised dietary advice from a dietitian.

We suggest keeping a food diary for up to three months to see if there is a correlation between your diet and your symptoms that might emerge as a possible link. One small downside to this approach, though, is that, for many, symptoms can vary as a normal part of the condition, and any correlation with your diet may be just a coincidence.

Useful resources:

- Ministry of Health Food and Nutrition guidelines – www.moh.govt.nz/foodandnutrition
- The Arthritis Society, Canada – www.arthritis.ca/local/files/pdf%20documents/Printed%20Publications/ENG_Nutrition.pdf
- Dietitians NZ – www.dietitians.org.nz/healthy-eating
- Healthy Food – www.healthyfood.co.nz

Where can I learn more?

www.arthritis.org.nz

Regional offices

Northern (Auckland) 09 523 8900

Midland/Central (Wellington) 04 472 1427

Southern (Christchurch) 03 366 8383

National office

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