

**CAN CHANGING MY DIET
REALLY HELP MY ARTHRITIS?**

Yes. Living with Arthritis can make it difficult to eat a proper variety of foods, especially when pain, fatigue or depression lowers the appetite or when painful joints and loss of mobility cause you to avoid foods that require time or effort to prepare.

The right diet can certainly help some people with arthritis. If you are overweight and suffer from arthritis, one of the most important things you can do to help yourself is to change the amount and type of food you eat. It is also important to consider whether your regular diet is giving you all the important basic nutrients including minerals such as calcium and iron. If it does not, then your general health will suffer and this may have an effect on your arthritis.

As with any treatment option, check with your GP or Specialist before starting something new.

ARTHRITIS
NEW ZEALAND
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Te whakapiki i te kounga ora

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DIET



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WHAT IS A HEALTHY DIET?

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

- Vegetables and fruit
- Wholegrain bread and cereals
- Milk and dairy products
- Lean meats, poultry and fish



The World Health Organisation recommends that we eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables every day. This makes sure the body receives important vitamins, minerals and antioxidants which it needs to maintain good health. Antioxidants can help protect joints and reduce inflammation by 'mopping up' some of the chemicals in your body which cause inflammation.

Choose fruit and vegetables of bright colours; as these tend to be rich in antioxidants. This includes apples, oranges, blueberries, spinach, tomatoes, avocado, beetroot and broccoli. Remember you also get fibre from fruit and vegetables as well as wholegrain breads, cereals, pasta and rice.



EATING A HEALTHY DIET AND LOSING WEIGHT

There are many slimming treatments and so-called miracle diets out there, and this can be confusing. Unfortunately there is no miracle cure for arthritis. Crash and fad diets are usually unbalanced and are not recommended. Most people find they put weight back on when they return to normal eating. The only way to lose weight permanently is to make permanent changes to the way you eat or the amount of exercise you do.



CAN DIET HELP IF I AM TAKING DRUGS?

Yes. A good diet still helps even if you are taking strong drugs for your arthritis. In fact, if you are, there is even more reason to eat a good diet as it can help to protect the body against some of the side-effects of drugs. For example steroids can cause osteoporosis, particularly in long-term treatment. Plenty of calcium in your diet will help to reduce the risk.

ARE THERE ANY DIETS OR FOOD SUPPLEMENTS WHICH ARE SUPPOSED TO HELP BUT DO NOT?

Some people feel that cutting out 'acidic fruit' such as oranges, lemons and grapefruit helps arthritis. Others believe that vegetables from the so-called nightshade family are bad for arthritis: this is a large plant family including potatoes, tomatoes, peppers (sweet and hot) and aubergines. There is no scientific evidence that leaving out either of these groups of fruits and vegetables helps arthritis. Such diets may have the undesired effect of reducing the beneficial antioxidants in the diet.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN POINTS TO REMEMBER ABOUT MY DIET?

Arthritis New Zealand and other organisations are continuing to support research into the links between what you eat and your arthritis. From the evidence so far, we recommend that you should:

- try to lose weight, if you are overweight, by changing your eating habits and increasing exercise if possible – not by crash diets
- eat less sugar and fat, especially saturated fat
- eat more fruit and vegetables, especially brightly coloured varieties
- include plenty of calcium- and iron-rich foods
- try replacing meat with oily fish twice per week (unless you have gout).

People with arthritis face a long term condition with unpredictable symptoms. If you feel a major change is warranted, first discuss your intentions with your doctor or dietician to ensure you will be provided with the necessary balance to maintain good health.

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