

September is Arthritis Awareness Month



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Arthritis is a complex condition that affects 1 in 5 Canadians. For many it can be debilitating, limiting mobility and increasing one's risk for falls. Arthritis is not a single disease, but refers to roughly 100 conditions affecting joints. Common symptoms of arthritis include joint inflammation, pain, stiffness, and diminished range of motion. Symptoms can range from mild to severe, may come and go, and can affect one or several joints.

The most common types of arthritis are osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis. Osteoarthritis occurs when the cartilage between the bones wears away, while rheumatoid arthritis is an autoimmune disease in which the body's immune system attacks healthy joint tissue. To read further on the different types of arthritis, visit:

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/topics/arthritis#arthritis0>

Strategies that support the management of arthritis include:

- Exercise
- Maintaining a healthy body weight
- Healthy diet and gut microbiome
- Therapies

Exercise is especially important for those living with arthritis. It's understandable that when your joints hurt, you may not be eager to exercise. It is important to consider however, that exercise can contribute to pain relief and reduce stress. Some ways in which exercise contributes to the management of arthritis is by:

- Strengthening muscles around joints
- Helping to maintain bone strength
- Increasing energy
- Improving sleep quality
- Controlling weight
- Improving balance
- Improving mood

For more information on helpful tips and exercises visit:

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/arthritis/in-depth/arthritis/art-20047971>

<https://arthritis.ca/living-well/2020/top-10-arthritis-exercises>

Maintaining a healthy body weight can have a positive impact on managing symptoms of arthritis.

Decreasing your body weight by just 10% can reduce strain on load-bearing joints like hips, knees and feet. Being overweight can increase the amount of inflammation in the body, and contribute to insulin resistance; both contributing to joint damage and joint pain.

To learn more about why weight loss matters for managing arthritis, visit:

<https://arthritis.ca/living-well/2023/why-weight-loss-matters-when-you-live-with-arthritis>

A healthy diet and gut microbiome are often overlooked as factors in the prevention and mitigation of joint degeneration, and systemic inflammation. The gut microbiome is a regulator of inflammation, and therefore maintaining its microbial diversity and health could help to regulate local and systemic inflammation in the body. Including foods into your diet that help your body produce healthy gut bacteria can lead to a better functioning immune system, less inflammation, and less arthritis related pain. Not only can foods promote a healthy gut microbiome, but many foods are anti-inflammatory. Likewise, some foods may increase inflammation in body. It is also important to note that food sensitivities are not always easy to recognize, and could promote biochemical reactions in the body that lead to inflammation and joint pain.

Tips to help your body maintain a healthy gut microbiome:

- Include plenty of foods rich in insoluble fiber, which tend to contain the most prebiotics. Foods such as whole-grains, asparagus, onions, garlic, beans, lentils, and peas are good sources.
- Limit sugar, saturated fat, and processed foods. These foods can contribute to inflammation, and deplete the good bacteria in the gut.

For more information on managing arthritis symptoms with foods, visit:

<https://newsnetwork.mayoclinic.org/discussion/mayo-clinic-minute-fighting-arthritis-with-food/>

<https://www.arthritis.org/health-wellness/healthy-living/nutrition/anti-inflammatory/the-ultimate-arthritis-diet>

To read a research review on the gut microbiome-joint connection, visit:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6903327/pdf/corhe-32-92.pdf>

Therapies can help with managing arthritis pain. Commonly used therapies include physical therapy, occupational therapy, chiropractic, osteopathy, electrical stimulation, as well as mobility and assistive devices. Your healthcare professionals can help you with a treatment plan that suits your individual needs. To read more about treating symptoms of arthritis with complementary therapies such as acupuncture, massage therapy, or naturopathic medicine, visit: <https://arthritis.ca/treatment/pain-management/complementary-therapies/types-of-complementary-therapies>

If you are living with arthritis and considering trying new strategies to help you manage your symptoms, ensure that your plans are manageable. Small changes that you can maintain will help you to sustain them long-term. Remember to aim for progress, not perfection.

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