

# FOOD NEWS

**Clare Thornton-Wood**, specialist dietitian, discusses the latest findings about diet and arthritis, fibromyalgia and bones



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## Spice blend may help lower inflammation

Adding spices to a meal can enhance more than just taste as a small study shows spice improves aspects of health by reducing inflammation.

A total of 12 overweight or obese men aged 40–65 years old ate a meal high in fat and carbohydrates with six grams of a spice blend. Afterwards, blood tests showed they had reduced inflammatory cytokines compared to when they ate a meal with less or no spices.

The spice blend consisted of a blend of basil, bay leaf, black pepper, cinnamon, coriander, cumin, ginger, oregano, parsley, red pepper, rosemary, thyme and turmeric.

The researchers can't be sure which spice or spices contribute to the effect, or the precise mechanism in which the effect is created, but they think the spices have anti-inflammatory properties that help offset inflammation caused by the high-carb and high-fat meal.

"If spices are palatable to you, they might be a way to make a high-fat or high-carb meal



more healthful," says Dr Connie Rogers in the *Journal of Nutrition*. "We can't say from this study if it was one spice in particular, but this specific blend seemed to be beneficial. Ultimately the gold standard would be to get people eating more healthily and to lose

weight and exercise, but those behavioral changes are difficult and take time."

### Expert comment

*This is certainly an interesting study but was very small and only included men of specific age and medical profile.*

*The foods used were deliberately high in fat and carbohydrate so the researchers could easily measure the effects of the spices. It would be interesting to repeat using lower fat recipes to see if the results are similar.*

*Many herbs and spices have well established "medicinal" effects. Ginger is often promoted as anti-nausea during morning sickness. Black pepper contains piperine, an antioxidant that helps remove free radicals that cause premature aging and inflammation; it has even been linked to reduced inflammation in the airways of people with asthma.*

*The use of herbs and spices in foods is to be encouraged but the findings should not be taken as an antidote to consuming an unhealthy diet.*

## Caffeine increases risk of osteoarthritis early on in life

Bad news for coffee lovers, as a new evidence review highlights that caffeine heightens the chances of being affected by osteoarthritis. This time, pregnant women and young children are urged to lower intake of chocolate, coffee and tea.

Previous research has found that caffeine consumption has a negative impact on cartilage. It now seems this can happen early on in life – as young children or even sooner, when we are in the womb.

"Overall, there is ample evidence indicating that caffeine intake negatively affects the physiology of both articular and growth plate cartilage, increasing consumers predisposition to suffer osteoarthritis and long bone growth inhibition [which leads to growth



retardation]," the research group discusses in the *Journal of Clinical Medicine*. "Due to its negative effects, caffeine consumption should be reduced and closely controlled. Specifically, this control should be mandatory for certain subjects whose caffeine metabolism is reduced, such as infants and pregnant women."

### Expert comment

*The pros and cons of consuming caffeine are often debated. This review article brings together the findings of a number of studies and looks specifically at the relationship of caffeine and bone health in pregnant women and young children.*

*There are already recommendations for the maximum intake of caffeine per day for adults (400mg/day and 200mg/day for pregnant*

*women). The amount of caffeine in drinks varies but as a guide the average mug of instant coffee contains 57mg, tea 42mg, soft fizzy drinks around 30–40mg and energy drinks 100–200mg per bottle/can.*

*Caffeine is also found in cocoa beans and hence chocolate although at lower levels than in drinks.*

*Caffeine is a stimulant and can help you stay alert and focused. Links have been found between regular consumption of caffeine and a lower risk of stroke, heart disease and diabetes. But caffeine is not an essential nutrient and it is wise to stay within the recommended limits. Some people will find they suffer unpleasant symptoms such as sleep disturbance, palpitations and shaking with even very small doses of caffeine.*

*Caffeinated beverages can also contain high levels of fat, sugar and calories, so do take this into account. Department of Health guidelines recommend children should not consume drinks containing caffeine.*