

FOOD NEWS

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



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Probiotics improve quality of life for people with arthritis

A relatively new foodie fad, probiotics are heralded as having various health benefits, especially where our gut is concerned. The relationship between the gut and inflammation is a current area of interest. So experts recently analysed the research that looks at the impact probiotics have on inflammatory arthritis and reported their findings in *Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice*. They found that probiotics were taken for an average of 60 days, and while a variety of different probiotics were used, *Lactobacillales* was the most popular.

Taking probiotics was not associated with negative side effects and was found to help people with arthritis in terms of:

- Benefitting quality of life, especially *Lactobacillales*-only formulations;
- Reducing pain;
- Having a positive impact on the inflammatory marker C-reactive protein, particularly in people with rheumatoid arthritis and from combined *Bifidobacteriales* and *Lactobacillales* formulations.

“This review indicates there may be



differential benefits to combined formulations of *Bifidobacteriales* and *Lactobacillales* compared to purely *Lactobacillales* formulations, with respect to reducing pain, lowering C-reactive protein and improving quality of life,” the experts conclude. “It also suggests variable benefits associated with the type of inflammatory arthritis.”

Expert comment

This comprehensive review looked at almost 6,000 articles about probiotics and inflammatory arthritis. The authors are careful to state that the research has been mainly carried out in older individuals and may not replicate in younger people and/or those with less established disease.

Probiotics are live bacteria and yeasts that help restore the balance of bacteria in the stomach and intestines. There is evidence they can be useful in preventing diarrhoea when taking antibiotics and in treating irritable bowel syndrome. Probiotics can be taken in liquid or capsule form and are found in yoghurts, miso, fermented cheese such as parmesan and cheddar, and sauerkraut.

There are a number of probiotics and each has specific health benefits. When trialling a probiotic the benefits are cumulative, so you need to take them over an extended period of time.

Probiotics should not be taken by people with compromised immune systems but are otherwise generally regarded as safe in recommended doses. Check with your healthcare provider or pharmacist if in any doubt.

Ideal diet for people with rheumatoid arthritis revealed

Rheumatology specialists are often asked about precise dietary recommendations for people with rheumatoid arthritis. Other than standard healthy eating advice it can be difficult to give exact instructions as the science at times appears to be conflicting.

But now a research team has looked at the evidence published in the area and put together some extremely precise advice in *Clinical Nutrition*, aiming to help people with rheumatoid arthritis eat to counteract inflammation.

DAILY

- Five portions of fruit and veg;
- Spices – curcumin, ginger and cinnamon;
- Three portions of carbohydrate, ideally in the form of cereals (such as rice, corn or buckwheat);
- One portion of low-fat milk and one portion of light yoghurt (or two portions of one of them);
- One 30g portion of seeds and dried fruits

or two portions of extra virgin olive oil;

- A small glass of red wine.

THREE TIMES A WEEK

White meat, omega-3 rich fish (ie mackerel or salmon) or fresh legumes.

TWICE A WEEK

Two portions of eggs or fresh cheese.

ONCE A WEEK

One portion of red meat or processed meat.

The team advises that people exercise every day, drink 1.5–2 litres of water, supplement the diet with vitamin D and omega 3 and avoid salt and sugar, concluding that “the food pyramid allows patients to easily figure out what to eat.”

Expert comment

The proposed diet looks to be balanced and is similar to the Mediterranean diet, which we know from extensive research is beneficial in the prevention of many diseases.

Five portions of fruit and vegetables a day are included. Portions of carbohydrate are adequate, although potentially slightly restrictive in choice as the diet seems to exclude wheat-based carbohydrates such as bread, couscous and pasta, and does not mention some other sources such as quinoa.

To meet full calcium requirements we generally recommend three servings of dairy or dairy replacement daily; this may be offset by including other sources of calcium.

The protein sources might need increasing as adequate high-quality protein is important for repair of the body. Consuming a protein source such as meat/fish/eggs/legumes twice a day may be a more appropriate suggestion. We need to be careful not to demonise particular foods so ‘banning salt and sugar’ is perhaps not a helpful message.

