

# FOOD NEWS

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



@claretwdiet  
www.claretw.com

## Vegetarian diets may increase the risk of fracture

Vegetarian diets – particularly vegan – are associated with lower bone mineral density values and could heighten the risk of fractures, says an evidence review in *Aging Clinical and Experimental Research*.

There is a current drive to prevent obesity and the many chronic medical conditions linked to it by promoting a healthy lifestyle. Measures include reducing dietary calorie intake via calorie restriction, intermittent fasting, vegetarian or vegan diets.

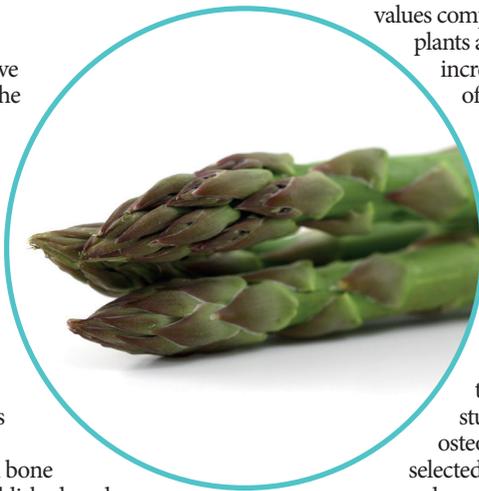
While these regimens are usually considered healthy, their impact on bone health has yet to be established, and some studies imply they have negative effects on our bones.

Experts looking at the evidence found only small studies have been done so far. But the research that exists suggests that:

- Calorie restriction reduces bone mineral density;

- Intermittent fasting does not reduce bone mineral density;

- Vegetarian diets (particularly vegan ones) are associated with lower bone mineral density values compared to diets that include plants and animals, and could increase the risk of fractures.



“Given these considerations, individuals who decide to follow these diets should be aware of the risk of osteoporosis and of bone fractures and should introduce dietary sources of calcium and Vitamin D and/or supplementation,” the team explains. “Future studies examining fracture/osteoporosis incidence in selected populations will be able to expand our knowledge about the safety of these diets and the risks linked to them.”

### Expert comment

*Following a vegetarian or vegan diet is increasing in popularity, which means we need to give nutrients implicated in bone health special consideration (for example protein, calcium,*

*vitamin B12 and zinc).*

*Traditional sources of calcium are found in foods containing protein, magnesium and calcium. Several vegetables contain calcium but the calcium in these sources is harder for the body to use.*

*Vegans can obtain calcium from tofu, fortified soy products or dairy milk substitutes but attention is required to ensure adequacy.*

*Vitamin D is essential for the body to be able to use calcium and we should all be taking a 10ug supplement daily during the winter months and consider doing so in summer.*

*Vitamin B12 is found in animal products and added fortified products such as breakfast cereals. Good plant sources are nutritional yeast, yeast extract and fortified soya products. It might also be wise to consider an over the counter supplement.*

*Naturally-occurring phytic acid in vegetables can reduce the body's absorption of zinc, which can be minimised by soaking dried beans before cooking.*

*It is encouraging that intermittent fasting has not been shown to reduce bone mineral density. Intermittent fasting is a popular lifestyle choice and research is ongoing. It has been shown to have beneficial effects in some groups of people for weight loss, insulin resistance and diabetes but should not be embarked upon without consulting your GP.*

*Following a healthy balanced diet (such as the Mediterranean diet) is still one of the best ways to control weight and ensure good bone health.*

## Avoid heavily processed food to maintain healthy heart in rheumatoid arthritis

Eating ultra-processed food is associated with higher risk of heart disease in rheumatoid arthritis researchers report in *Clinical Rheumatology*.

A total of 56 people aged on average 63 years old had their diets evaluated (unprocessed or minimally processed foods, processed foods, and ultra-processed foods). The researchers found that more consumption of ultra-processed foods was associated with:

- Higher 10-year cardiovascular risk of a person;
- Higher blood glucose levels, which indicates the onset of diabetes and subsequent heart disease.

Eating more unprocessed or minimally processed foods was associated with lower 10-year risk of developing cardiovascular diseases and cholesterol levels.

“Patients with rheumatoid arthritis consuming more ultra-processed foods showed worse metabolic profile, whereas those consuming more unprocessed or minimally processed foods had lower cardiovascular risks,” the group explains. “A food pattern characterized by a high ultra-processed food consumption appears to emerge as a novel, modifiable risk factor for cardiovascular diseases in rheumatoid arthritis.”



### Expert comment

*This is a small study but the results consolidate what we already know... eating a diet rich in unprocessed foods is best for our health. Most food and drink is processed in some way from washing, pasteurising and freezing to the removal of inedible portions, for example the shells of seeds or husks of grains. This doesn't generally alter the nutritional properties.*

*But at the other end of the spectrum are ultra-processed foods, which often then contain ingredients you would not add when cooking at home, such as colourings, preservatives, sweeteners and stabilisers. Examples are sausages, yoghurt with added sweeteners/sugar/flavourings, “ready meals”, dairy milk substitute drinks, sweets and biscuits.*

*All of these foods can be included in small amounts in the diet but should be kept to a minimum. Try having natural yoghurt with fresh fruit, meat and fish in its natural form rather than smoked or cured, keep ready meals for occasional use and eat a wide range of fruits and vegetables.*