

The Claim: Some Foods Can Ease Arthritis Pain

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Patients with arthritis are often encouraged to steer clear of all sorts of foods. But few of these diets are supported by any evidence.

In one of the largest analyses of diet and various types of arthritis, researchers looked at data on more than 800 patients from 15 studies. They examined several diets popular among arthritis patients and found that the one that had the greatest effect was a Mediterranean-type diet emphasizing foods like fruits, vegetables, grains, fish and olive oil, while limiting red meat. In 12 weeks, people on the diet reported about 15 percent less pain, but no improvement in physical function or morning stiffness. A vegetarian diet that allowed eggs and dairy products had a similar effect.

In other studies, patients who were given daily capsules of fish oil to take along with their antirheumatic medications saw greater benefits for swollen and tender joints than patients given a placebo, apparently because of the oil's anti-inflammatory properties.

Meanwhile, vegetables in the nightshade family, like potatoes and tomatoes, have long been said to contribute to arthritis pain. Some researchers have speculated that a group of compounds in the vegetables called alkaloids might worsen inflammation in sensitive people. But so far no solid studies have demonstrated this. Experts say a diet in which suspect foods are gradually removed should help patients identify any problematic foods.

THE BOTTOM LINE

There is some evidence that certain diets may help with arthritis symptoms.

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