

Why apples, avocados and a glass of red wine could ease your arthritis

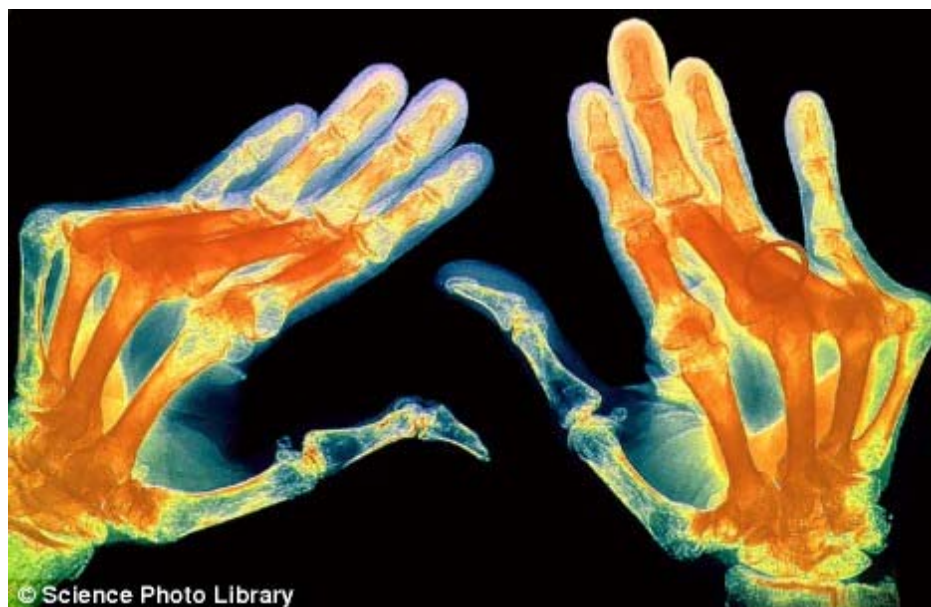
By [Dr Sarah Brewer](#)

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Arthritis is the term used for nearly 200 painful conditions of the joints and bones. It affects about 7million people in the UK and all types have similar symptoms of swelling, inflammation of joints, stiffness and restriction of movement.

Many of us take our joints for granted until they start playing up, by which time significant damage may already have occurred. But the sooner you start looking after your joints, the better.

The good news is that many cases of arthritis can be relieved, postponed or even prevented by good joint care.



Oil those joints: An X-ray of arthritic hands - showing painful rheumatoid arthritis

Research shows a definite link between the food you eat and the severity of your symptoms. Like your heart, your joints thrive best on plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables. Try to eat at least five (and preferably eight or more) servings a day.

Fruit and vegetables provide an array of antioxidants that reduce the rate at which cartilage breaks down, helping to slow the process of osteoarthritis. Antioxidants can also reduce inflammation and help combat rheumatoid arthritis, psoriatic arthritis and gout.

Apples and avocados are anti-inflammatory superfoods. Don't peel your apples - the skin contains five times more antioxidants than the flesh. Oily fish are a rich source of omega-3 essential fatty acids that oil the joints and damp down inflammation.

Research shows that omega-3 can reduce the long-term need for painkillers in those with joint problems. You should aim to eat oily fish such as salmon, sardines, herrings and mackerel two to four times a week. You can also take an omega-3 fish oil supplement.

Drink plenty of fluids - approximately three to five pints (two to three litres) - a day to maintain good hydration and a steady flow of nutrients to your joints. Choose from water, soups, tea and juices.

You may find your symptoms are triggered by particular foods. Culprit foods vary, so it's important to keep a food-and-symptom diary to help pinpoint the foods that irritate. This is not always easy, as symptoms can worsen up to 36 hours after eating a trigger food.

The foods most commonly found to worsen arthritis are wheat, corn, rye, sugar, caffeine, yeast, malt, dairy products, oranges, grapefruit, lemons and tomatoes. Meats most likely to provoke symptoms are bacon, pork, beef and lamb.

A number of foods may trigger joint pain in those with arthritis. Research shows that when these are avoided, about 70 per cent

of sufferers report less pain and improved mobility.

Some are particularly sensitive to foods from the nightshade (Solanaceae) family. Commonly eaten nightshade foods include potatoes, tomatoes, aubergine, sweet peppers, paprika, cayenne and all other types of pepper (except black pepper).

Try to minimise your intake of vegetable oils rich in omega-6, such as sunflower oil, because these promote inflammation. Switch to olive oil for cooking, and macadamia nut oil or walnut oil for salad dressings.

Studies have also shown an association between the amount of meat and offal consumed and arthritis.

Eating a vegan (no animal products) diet can reduce the number of tender and swollen joints.



Apples and avocados can help counter the onset of arthritis

Weight loss is one of the most effective ways to reduce pain in your knees and hips, whatever form of arthritis you have. When you walk, the load on your knees increases by four times your body weight. This means that if you are 10lb (4.5kg) overweight, the load on your leg joints is up to 40lb (18kg) more than if you were at a healthy weight.

And that's on level ground. When walking downhill, the compressive force on your knees reaches eight times your body weight, greatly increasing the strain on your joints. Lose just 1lb (0.45kg) and there is at least a 4lb (1.8kg) reduction in the load on your knee joints.

Studies show that weight loss can at least halve the level of pain experienced by those with arthritis affecting their lower limbs - this is a better result than standard drug treatments.

There are a number of therapies you can use to complement the orthodox treatment of arthritis. These include practitioner-led therapies such as Reiki, osteopathy and chiropractic.

Research suggests they help reduce chronic pain and stress. In one study, 82 people with osteoarthritis found pain intensity reduced during the six-week period they had weekly Reiki sessions.

Some self-help therapies are also beneficial. Hydrotherapy (exercising in water) and saunas, steam rooms, hot tubs, ice packs and aromatherapy baths can help ease pain.

Therapies such as aromatherapy, meditation and yoga work mainly through relaxation, reducing the strain on muscles, ligaments and joints.

Others, such as acupuncture, reflexology and homeopathy, harness your body's own natural healing abilities to reduce pain.

• *Overcoming Arthritis*, by Dr Sarah Brewer, is published by Duncan Baird at £12.99. To order your copy for £12.99 inc p&p, call the Mail on Sunday Bookshop on 0845 155 0730.

Red wine is good, take care with the chillies

The foods below have a natural anti-inflammatory action that's particularly beneficial for those with arthritis - however, some (such as chilli peppers) may trigger an idiosyncratic reaction in some sufferers.

Apples: Contain anti-inflammatory antioxidants. Red Delicious apples contain the most. The antioxidants are five times more concentrated in the apple's skin than the flesh.

Avocados: Contain antioxidant monounsaturated oils, essential fatty acids and Vitamin E. Promote cartilage repair in osteoarthritis.

Chillies: Contain capsaicin and dihydrocapsaicin which block transmission of pain messages. They also trigger endorphins - the brain's own morphine-like painkillers.

Dark green leafy vegetables: Broccoli, spinach, cabbage and parsley, for example, supply antioxidants, Vitamin C, calcium and magnesium.

Macadamia nuts: The richest source of monounsaturated fatty acids. Also contain Vitamin E and selenium.

Oily fish: A great source of omega-3 fatty acids.

Red wine: A good source of antioxidant polyphenols which reduce inflammation.

Walnuts: A rich source of omega-3 fatty acids. Some research shows that eating them daily can help alleviate the symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis.

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eating meat is bad for you bad for the animals and bad for the earth.

- dirk alan, toledo ohio usa, 21/6/2009 15:07

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The apples and avos aren't helping mine, maybe I need to start on the red wine too

- Karen, England, 21/6/2009 12:24

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Pity it is so difficult to buy Red Delicious apples in UK supermarkets! They are by far the most tasty apples to eat.

- JR, Worcester, England, 21/6/2009 11:31

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Red wine brings my rheumatism on!

Diet is definitely the way to go with rheumatoid arthritis. I take 10 one a day fish oils (not cod liver, too much is toxic) and two one a day star flower oils. I have also cut out eggs, dairy, yeast and cashew nuts after doing the york test for food allergies. This overhaul of my diet (plus using an exercise bike to increase the blood flow round my joints) has had a great effect on my rheumatism. I don't have to take any painkillers (so far, touch wood!) and if I accidentally eat any of my trigger foods (especially egg in my case), boy do I know about it! If you have rheumatism, don't take it lying down. Fight it every step of the way and begin with what you put into your body.

It is a horrible, exhausting and depressing illness. Good luck and best wishes to all my fellow sufferers.

- Nicola, Manchester, UK, 21/6/2009 10:11

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It's a difficult balance as tomatoes, cayenne, paprika and sweet potatoes - any red foods, in fact - helped to ward off or fight cancers such as prostate cancer.

- ali, Brighton, 21/6/2009 09:27

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Great but what about the drugs people are on to ease the pain, all types says REFRAIN FROM ALCOHOL so there goes the red wine theory

- idris fricker, spalding lincs, 21/6/2009 09:03

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