

## Chinese Medicine and Arthritis

According to the wisdom of Oriental medicine, what causes arthritis is sometimes different from conventional understanding. These causes may seem unusual to you, but pay attention to these causes. You can stop problems for yourself in the future if you understand and avoid them.

There are certain conditions that make you pre-disposed to getting arthritis:

- Overwork (or play) that puts a strain on your spine or joints
- Repetitive motion (from work, sports, et. al.)
- Getting run down physically
- Accidents / trauma
- Excess emotions

Basically, these conditions weaken your body so it's vulnerable to other factors. Once you are pre-disposed to getting arthritis, there always must be some excess or unseasonable exposure to the elements. This means being exposed to wind, cold or dampness after you are already vulnerable due to the above factors. This could include:

- Jogging in the cold or rain
- Wearing too little clothing on a windy or cold day
- Living in a damp basement (or other environment)
- Leaving your hair wet after showering
- Wearing wet clothing around after swimming
- Unseasonable or sudden change of weather

Sudden change of weather or exposure to wind, cold or dampness, combines with your body's inability to adapt to it leads to arthritis. To avoid causing arthritis in the future:

- Always dress appropriately for the weather
- Stay out of excess or unseasonable weather
- Don't wear damp clothes
- Avoid work or living situations that are windy, cold or damp
- Keep yourself healthy and strong so you aren't vulnerable to those conditions

## Food Therapy and Arthritis

Oriental medicine puts more emphasis on diet for arthritis than conventional medicine, even though it's seen often as an indirect cause. While over-exposure to the elements (cold, damp, etc.) is the an important direct cause, a poor diet leaves you in a weakened state, more vulnerable to those factors, so it is a very important factor. Also, Chinese Medicine does see strong connection between an acidic condition of you blood (acidosis) and arthritis. Eat a diet that avoids acid-causing foods and strengthens you in a way that leaves you less vulnerable to the "elements."

Avoid known acid-causing foods, including: meat, eggs, sugar, citrus fruits, alcohol and coffee.

Chinese medicine also specifically sees a connection between "sour" tasting foods and tendon / joint problems. So avoid vinegar, oranges, grapefruit, pickles, and yogurt.

Increase alkaline foods such as vegetables and miso soup. There are also some behaviors that cause acidity. They are worry, fear, shallow breathing, not chewing food enough, and overexertion.

To promote optimum health and keep you less vulnerable to developing arthritis in the first place, you want to focus on what to eat, rather than what to avoid (it's easier that way). Here are some main principles that will put you on the right track.

Eat a diet composed mainly of:

- Lightly cooked vegetables (a big variety. Only eat small amounts of fruit.
- Some whole grains (brown rice is good)
- Small amounts of animal food (more for flavor than as a main course - 2 to 3 oz. per day)
- Drink only room temperature or warm water (some green tea is o.k.)
- To get the best effects, stay away from everything else as much as possible, and try to buy clean, organic produce and foods without chemicals.
- Specific foods that are good for arthritis: alfalfa, cabbage, celery, cereal grasses, cherry, chives, glutathione peroxidase, grapes, hydrogen peroxide, kombu, omega-3, orange peel, potatoes, purified water, royal jelly, scallions, selenium, sesame oil, spelt, spirulina, soy sprouts, speroxide dismutase, wheat grass, wild blue green algae

### **Alfalfa For Arthritis**

Eating alfalfa for arthritis can also be a good idea. Adding it to your diet is not as strong as altering your diet completely, but it's a common folk remedy and has many benefits. Alfalfa contains lots of minerals (calcium, magnesium, phosphorus and potassium) that have a neutralizing effect on your blood. Since arthritis is often caused by acidosis (an acid condition of the blood), alfalfa can help reverse or prevent that condition. It also has a general detoxifying effect on your body. It is not recommended to use alfalfa powder. Instead, make alfalfa tea:

Place 1 ounce of alfalfa in a pot. Cover it with one quart of water. Boil for thirty minutes Strain and drink the quart throughout the day. Do this for only 2 or 3 weeks, then break for a week before starting again.

Research suggests that 10 to 20% of arthritis sufferers will benefit from using alfalfa, with an nearly total reduction of pain symptoms.

### **Exercise For Arthritis**

Exercise for arthritis is considered important by both Chinese and conventional medicine. The health benefits of activating your larger muscle groups are only beginning to be understood here in the west, although Oriental medicine has long known and promoted these benefits. Regular exercise can:

- Strengthen the muscles surrounding arthritic joints
- Lessen bone loss
- Control joint swelling and pain
- Lubricate the joints
- Reduce stiffness and pain
- Decrease fatigue
- Improve sleep
- Increase flexibility
- Increase weight loss (important for overweight arthritis sufferers).

Not all exercises are the same, though. Some can even cause arthritis. Aerobics, weight lifting and jogging are not always good for the joints, from the perspective of Oriental medicine. Walking and biking are usually better choices.

The absolute best arthritis exercise would be tai chi (or possibly even yoga). They help your overall health, too. Tai chi is a gentle exercise that will:

- Improve your circulation (important for arthritis)
- Calm stress (which is one component of pain)
- Reduce the risk of falls (by almost 48% according to one study)

- Greatly improve overall health

If you feel you're in too much pain to start exercise for arthritis, begin with "water exercise". The water reduces the stress on your joints. Once you've improved your strength and mobility, you can move on to other types of exercise. Considering that some exercises are tough on the joints, it's impressive that a study showed a 10-week course of tai chi did not aggravate arthritis. You can find tai chi classes locally, or use instructional videos found online.