

NKS Arthritis Diet

The problem: Inflammation

Inflammation is the process by which the body's white blood cells protect us from injury, infection and irritation. This protective process causes pain and swelling when you bump your head, get a bug bite or suffer from the flu. Chronic inflammation, is at the root of many diseases like Rheumatoid Arthritis, Ankylosing Spondylitis and Asthma. It can also increase your risk of heart disease and Cancer. It is very important to reduce levels of inflammation in the body. You can do this by eating anti-inflammatory foods as well as avoiding pro-inflammatory foods.

Top Anti-inflammatory foods to add to your diet:

1) Wild Alaskan Salmon- Salmon is an excellent source of EPA and DHA. These 2 potent Omega-3 acids reduce inflammation. The benefits of Omega-3's have been backed by years of scientific research ranging from preventing heart disease and cancer to treating auto-immune disease and depression. Be sure to include this in your diet at least twice a week. Atlantic Salmon is not good because it contains high levels of mercury and pesticides. You can also take a purified fish oil supplement. Ask your pharmacist about this.

2) Turmeric- This Asian spice commonly found in curry powder contains a powerful non-toxic compound called Curcumin. Studies found that turmeric's anti-inflammatory effects are equivalent to hydrocortisone or Advil/Aleve but having no side effects. You can buy this in supplement form if cooking with curry is not for you. Alternatively, you can buy Turmeric in the spice aisle (very cheap) and mix with olive oil and drink on a daily basis.

3) Shiitake Mushroom- Enjoyed by the Chinese since ancient times, shiitake mushroom is known for its immune boosting properties and anti-inflammatory effects. They also have a strong anti-cancer effect.

4) Green Tea (White Tea)- The flavonoids in green tea are potent natural anti-inflammatory compounds that have been shown in numerous studies to reduce the risk of heart disease and cancer. They also reduce inflammation in RA and other inflammatory conditions such as acne. White tea contains just 15mg of caffeine per cup (vs green tea's 60mg) and has a more mellow taste. Many people who dislike green tea, quite enjoy white tea.

5) Pineapple- A tropical fruit contains bromelain, an enzyme that aids in the healing of indigestion, sports injury, trauma, arthritis and other kinds of swelling. Extracts of bromelain have also been proven to be as effective as NSAIDS (Advil, Aleve etc)

6) Extra Virgin Olive Oil- Virgin olive oil's monounsaturated fats are anti-inflammatory agents that are very helpful in conditions such as Asthma and RA. Following a Mediterranean Diet is the secret to longevity and health.

7) Spinach- This wonderfood has so many anti-inflammatory flavanoids and carotenoids, it's hard to believe. If you are not big on eating spinach, a great way around this is adding it to a morning smoothie with frozen blueberries. The taste of the blueberries overshadows the spinach which is essentially tasteless. Try to buy organic versions of these 2 great food because they are heavily sprayed with pesticides. They are available in most supermarkets as organics are becoming more mainstream.

Foods to avoid as they are Pro-Inflammatory:

1) Sugars- Excessive sugar intake creates inflammation in the body and has been linked to many diseases. Try to Limit sodas, desserts, pastries etc Healthier substitutes include fresh fruits and using Stevia or Xylitol as sweeteners. (avoid Aspartame and Splenda).

2) Common cooking oils- Common vegetable oils used in many homes and restaurants have very high Omega-6 fatty acids and very low Omega 3's. When you your Omega 6's and 3's are out of balance, you are much more prone to inflammatory diseases of all kinds. Healthy oils include Extra Virgin Olive Oil and Extra Virgin Coconut oil. Olive oil is good for use cold dishes or low heat cooking and coconut oil is better suited for high heat cooking. Butter is OK once in a while for a treat but should also be avoided.

3) Trans Fats- These hydrogenated oils promote inflammation, obesity and lay the groundwork for degenerative illnesses to grow. They are found in deep fried foods, commercially baked goods and margarines to name a few. Your best bet is to read the ingredients to make sure that "partially hydrogenated" or "vegetable shortening" is not on the list.

4) Red meat and processed meat- Researchers have found that red meat contains a molecule that humans don't naturally produce called Neu5Gc. After ingesting this compound, the body develops antibodies that trigger the inflammation response. Processed meat, which refers to meat that has been smoked, cured or chemically preserved is not any better. A 2007 Report by the World Cancer Research Fund stated that processed and red meats are "convincing" causes of cancers of the colon, rectum and esophagus. Try to limit red meat to once or twice a week and eat fish and chicken more often.

5) Some artificial food additives like aspartame and MSG trigger inflammatory processes especially in people who are already suffering from inflammatory conditions like RA. Avoid packaged/processed foods (middle aisles in the grocery store) and make sure your Chinese food contains no MSG. Try cooking with herbs and spices instead of processed foods. It's a very healthy way to add taste to your food without all of the chemicals. If you choose to supplement your diet (other than the ones already mentioned), consider these: Borage Oil Quercetin Milk Thistle (Silymarin) These have been shown to disable white blood cells responsible for inflammation. (macrophages and microglia) Last but not least, Magnesium has been shown to drastically reduce inflammation, boost cellular antioxidant defenses and prevents many of the complications of inflammatory arthritis such as cancer, brain damage and heart disease. Severe chronic inflammatory disease causes the body to lose a tremendous amount of magnesium. Steroids (often used to treat RA) also deplete the body of this vital element.