Dietary Guidance for Inflammatory Arthritis

DIET AND NUTRITION



Nutrition Matters

Diet cannot cure arthritis, but eating well can support a healthy weight, protect heart health, and modulate persistent pain. This is especially important because inflammatory arthritis such as rheumatoid arthritis is linked with an increased risk of cardiovascular disease

Focus on a balanced and varied dietary eating pattern

There is no shortage of advice online or books about diet and arthritis. Unfortunately, most are not based on robust scientific data. The European Alliance of Associations for Rheumatology (EULAR) recommends a healthy balanced diet for the management of inflammatory arthritis. There is evidence of beneficial effects of following a Mediterranean dietary regime. In recent years, the use of a plant-based diet has been found to be effective in lowering disease activity.

Foods to Consider

- **'Eat a Rainbow':** Eat a variety of colourful fruit and vegetables. Berries, leafy greens, peppers, tomatoes, carrots, and citrus fruits provide antioxidants, polyphenols and fibre.

- **Healthy fats get the thumbs up:** Oily fish, marine algae (if vegetarian), extra virgin olive oil, nuts, seeds, and avocado.

- **Place emphasis on wholegrains:** oats, brown rice, wholemeal bread, quinoa, and wholegrain pasta support digestive health and boost fibre content.

- **Pulses for non-meat-based protein:** lentils, chickpeas, beans and peas are affordable sources of protein and fibre.

- **Don't forget your calcium:** dairy foods, fortified alternatives, eggs, oily fish, and safe sunlight exposure support bone health.

- **Consider fermented foods for gut health:** Sourdough bread, live yoghurt, kefir, tempeh, sauerkraut or kimchi are great choices.

Foods to Limit

- Limit sugary drinks, sweets, pastries, and frequent high-sugar snacks.

- Reduce ultra-processed foods such as many ready meals, crisps, processed meats, and fast foods.

Which Supplements to Take

Plenty of dietary supplements offer benefits but so far none have shown long term benefits. The only supplement worth taking is Vitamin D. If you are considering taking a dietary supplement, check with a GP, community pharmacist or dietitian before starting.

What to Remember

The best approach is not a strict “arthritis diet”, but a balanced, Mediterranean-style eating pattern that is practical, enjoyable, and sustainable. Combine nutrition with regular movement, good sleep, stopping smoking (if you smoke), and ongoing medical care.

Useful resources

- Learn more about the **Mediterranean Diet**: **https://www.arthritisaction.org.uk/can-a-mediterranean-diet-help**
- Watch Martin Lau talk about **Food and Arthritis** (YouTube): **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n7Uhwtwi3Wc**
- Browse healthy, **Arthritis-Friendly Recipes**: **https://www.arthritisaction.org.uk/living-with-arthritis/resource-centre/recipes**

References

1. Daien C, Czernichow S, Letarouilly JG, Nguyen Y, Sanchez P, Sigaux J, Beauvais C, Desouches S, Le Puillandre R, Rigalleau V, Rivière P, Romon M, Semerano L, Seror R, Sfedj S, Tournadre A, Vacher D, Wendling D, Flipo RM, Sellam J. Dietary recommendations of the French Society for Rheumatology for patients with chronic inflammatory rheumatic diseases. Joint Bone Spine. 2022 Mar;89(2):105319.
2. Gwinnet JM, Wieczorek M, Rodríguez-Carrio J, Balanescu A, Bischoff-Ferrari HA, Boonen A, et al. Effects of diet on the outcomes of rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases (RMDs): systematic review and meta-analyses informing the 2021 EULAR recommendations for lifestyle improvements in people with RMDs. RMD Open. 2022;8:e002167.
3. Nikiphorou E, Philippou E. Nutrition and its role in prevention and management of rheumatoid arthritis. Autoimmun Rev. 2023 Jul;22(7):103333. doi: 10.1016/j.autrev.2023.103333. Epub 2023 Apr 17.
4. Nutrition and Chronic Pain. International Associated Study of Pain. https://www.iasp-pain.org/resources/fact-sheets/nutrition-and-chronic-pain/. Assessed on the 17/8/2026.
5. Wagenaar CA, Walrabenstein W, van der Leeden M, Turkstra F, Gerritsen M, Twisk JWR, Boers M, van der Esch M, van Middendorp H, Weijs PJM, van Schaardenburg D. Long-term effectiveness of a lifestyle intervention for rheumatoid arthritis and osteoarthritis: 1-year follow-up of the 'Plants for Joints' randomised clinical trial. RMD Open. 2024 Feb 27;10(1):e004025.

Last reviewed: 16 October 2026

Author: Martin Lau, Services Manager and Dietitian - Arthritis Action