

Healthy Eating for Arthritis

This handout explains how the food you eat can affect your arthritis. Healthy eating may help you control some of your symptoms and manage side effects from some medicines. If you are overweight, losing some weight may make your joints feel better.

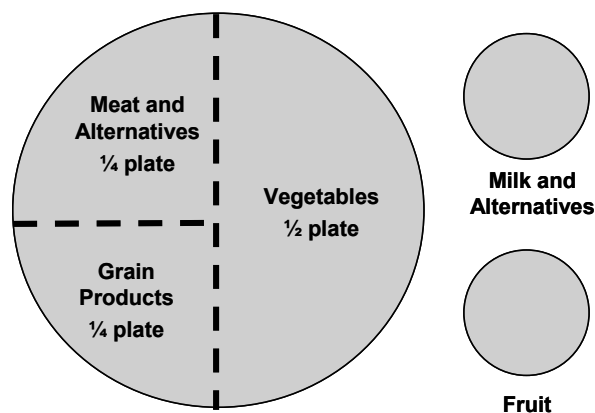
Where should I start?

Start by following Canada's Food Guide. This guide talks about healthy eating for everyone, including those with arthritis. See the *More Information* section at the end of this handout for a link to get your copy of the Food Guide.

Eating well can help you feel healthy and give you more energy. It can also lower your risk of getting other long-term diseases like diabetes, heart disease, osteoporosis, and some kinds of cancer.

Choose the right amount of food for your age and gender, as outlined in Canada's Food Guide. This will help to reach and stay at a healthy weight. The Food Guide also gives ideas and suggestions for the types of foods to choose.

- Use the picture of the healthy plate below to help you plan meals. Fill half your plate with vegetables. Include the right portions of whole grains and lean meat or meat alternatives. Add a glass of low fat milk or alternative and fruit for a balanced meal.



Eat More Vegetables and Fruit

- Choose a variety of colourful vegetables and fruit each day. These foods are rich in nutrients called antioxidants, which may help to reduce inflammation. Antioxidants may also help slow down damage to your joints caused by some kinds of joint disease.
- Eat at least one dark green and one orange vegetable each day. Try broccoli, spinach, kale, romaine lettuce, bell peppers, yams, or winter squash like butternut or acorn squash.



Choose Healthy Fats

- Fish is a good source of a healthy fat called omega-3 fat. This type of fat may help if you have an inflammatory type of arthritis.
- Eat at least 2 servings of a variety of fish each week. Fatty fish such as salmon, mackerel, herring, and sardines are the best sources of omega-3 fats.
- Other sources of omega-3 fats include chia or ground flax seeds, walnuts. Some foods have omega-3 fats added to them: eggs, orange juice, or a soy beverage.
- Healthy fats are also found in nuts, seeds, and nut or seed butters. These all count as servings of Meat and Alternatives. Avocado contains healthy fat and counts as a Vegetable and Fruit serving. If you include these foods, be sure to count them in your Food Guide servings for the day.



- Use small amounts (2 to 3 Tbsp a day) of vegetable oils or soft margarines made with canola or olive oil. This includes added fats used in cooking, spreads, or dressings.



- Limit how much saturated and trans fat you eat. These fats are found in butter, lard, shortening, hard (hydrogenated) margarines, and commercial baked goods. These types of fats may make inflammation worse.

Will supplements help my arthritis?

If you take special medicines for your arthritis, you might benefit from a supplement.

- If you take steroids for your arthritis, you may need to take extra calcium and vitamin D. Talk with your healthcare provider about the amount that is right for you.
- If you take methotrexate for your arthritis, you may need to take a folic acid supplement. Talk with your healthcare provider about the amount that is right for you.

Vitamin, mineral, and herbal supplements have not been shown to help arthritis symptoms. Follow the recommendations of Canada's Food Guide to meet your nutrient needs.

Always check with your healthcare provider before taking any supplements or herbs.

What about special diets?

Many books and websites claim that some foods or special diets will cure arthritis or help with symptoms. However, research shows that **no** particular food or diet will cure arthritis.

Avoid diets that ask you to stay away from certain foods. Doing this could cause you to get less of the nutrition you need to stay healthy.

If you are planning to cut out foods or change the way you eat, speak with a dietitian for help in meeting your nutrient needs.

For more information

These websites may be helpful:

- www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide Information about Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide. You can also call **1-866-225-0709** for a copy of the guide.
- Health Canada's website about the Safe Use of Natural Health Products. Health Canada www.hc-sc.gc.ca → Search → "Safe use of natural health products".
- www.dietitians.ca Dietitians of Canada has information about healthy eating, a Recipe Analyzer, and EATracker, a tool that analyzes your food choices and helps you plan your meals.