

DIETARY AND LIFESTYLE STRATEGIES IN THE MANAGEMENT OF OSTEOARTHRITIS

By: CARA KASDORF, RD, M.A.N., SPORTS NUTRITIONIST

Osteoarthritis (OA) can be a debilitating condition that often prevents people from living an active lifestyle. Because of this, the ability to lose or maintain weight can be difficult, creating more pressure on the joints, and thus more pain, creating a vicious cycle that is often difficult to break. However, there are several lifestyle and dietary strategies that can be implemented in order to best manage OA. This article will outline strategies that can be helpful in OA, and dispel some of the myths.

Weight Management and OA

There is evidence to suggest that a weight loss of 10% is associated with improved function in people with OA. Managing weight can be difficult to achieve and is often multi-factorial. Start by making healthy food choices every day. You will feel more energized and will be able to better maintain your weight and also achieve your weight loss goals.

Strategies for Successful Weight Loss

- Moderate weight loss of 1/2 – 1 pound/week will allow your body to gradually adjust to your changing weight, while enabling you to eat a variety of foods as outlined in Canada’s Food Guide to Healthy Eating.
- Establish Action Steps to help reach your goal. Make your goals as specific as possible – start with setting 1 goal per week, or even per month – whatever you feel is most achievable. Achieving small goals will create more motivation and small steps **will** make a difference!
- Less is Best! Are you suffering from portion distortion? Most people are out of touch with what a portion size actually looks like thanks to our “super-size” society.

Start by trying to have ½ a plate of vegetables at dinner, ¼ plate of rice or potatoes and ¼ plate of meat or other protein. Try also using a smaller plate. Consult with your local dietitian and learn more about portion sizes and recommended servings for weight loss.

- Set yourself up to succeed! Identify food/beverages, people and/or situations that elicit an urge to overeat. Avoid these food cues at all costs. (i.e. don’t buy tempting food, take a different route home to avoid fast food alley, and avoid negative people, etc.)
- Eat 6 small meals each day. This will help you shrink your stomach that may have been stretched from eating large portions of food.
- Eat to live vs. Live to eat! Enjoy all food, including occasional treats – MODERATION is the key. I often recommend one “treat” of 250kcal/week to clients on a weight loss program.
- Regular, moderate exercise is essential for successful weight loss. Aim for 30-60 minutes 5-7 days/week. Check with your doctor to find out what exercises would be best for your OA.

Supplements and OA

Many people take supplements such as glucosamine and chondroitin to help manage their OA. There are also a number of other supplements available that claim to help with the pain from OA, or to prevent the progression. Unfortunately, there is not enough evidence and good research on these supplements yet to support whether or not they might be beneficial. Make sure to consult your dietitian or physician before starting any supplements.

Antioxidants

There has been some research done on the effect of antioxidants, such as vitamins E, C, and A, and their effect on OA. The theory is that these antioxidants may provide some defense against damaged tissue. However, in most studies, there was no improvement when participants took these antioxidants in supplement form. Some studies, however, showed a decreased progression of OA with a higher dietary intake of these antioxidants. Either way you will certainly do no harm and only benefit by consuming more antioxidant-rich foods. Good sources of vitamin E include: dark green leafy vegetables, plant oils, oil-based salad dressing and nuts. Good sources of vitamin A include: tomatoes, dark green and yellow vegetables, peaches and apricots. Good sources of vitamin C include: tomatoes, broccoli, peppers and citrus fruit. Make sure to consume some of these foods on a daily basis!

Conclusion

Start with the simple steps outlined above – to start feeling better today! Start with small steps, and over time you will be amazed at how much you can achieve. Contact your local dietitian for personalized nutrition information and recommendations in order to optimize your diet and overall health!



Cara Kasdorf, RD, BSc M.A.N, is a registered dietitian and sports nutritionist. Cara is committed to educating people about optimal nutrition and helping people live a healthy active life, while learning how to properly fuel their body. Cara promotes and inspires a balanced approach to eating for energy and active living.