

## OsteoArthritis; Complementary & Alternative Medical Therapy

Osteoarthritis (OA) is the common “wear and tear” arthritis that we all get if we live long enough. Aging is the major cause of this disease. Prior trauma can also predispose to it’s development. It typically presents as stiffness/aches/pains in the joints, especially the weight bearing joints. After some use the joints seem to “loosen up” and move easier and perhaps feel better. OA is the cause of the symptoms that we all “know” happens to pretty much everybody with aging.

It doesn’t really have to however!

What’s more, there are other conditions that are related to this in the sense that there is a common pathway causing the symptoms and a common pathway for the cure.

Many folks also develop spinal disc disease as they age. It’s pretty common to see spinal MRI reports that relate bulging discs, sometimes laminar tears, impingement on nerves and other problems that cause a lot of pain and disability.

I celebrated my 45th birthday with lumbar disc disease. I was getting dressed in the morning, bent over to put my pants on and blew L4,5 on the left. The pain dropped me to my hands and knees. I had to get to the hospital to discharge a patient who was ready to go home. Before long I was flat on my back in bed though taking anti-inflammatories and muscle relaxants hoping the intense pain would ease up. By ten PM I had to dial “911” because I couldn’t move due to the agony.

A good friend of mine was the neurosurgeon who did my surgery. The next day I felt great! A week later however I was back in pain that was subsequently unrelieved with steroid epidural and facet blocks. I couldn’t stand up straight and pain was my constant companion. The surgeon offered to put me on chronic narcotics for pain control, but I couldn’t afford to be “stoned and stupid” and put my patients at risk by trying to practice medicine like that for the rest of my life. I declined the offer, opting to continue working through the pain.

A year and a half went by with this ever-faithful companion taking it’s toll on my personal, professional and family life. One day as I was walking into church, a friend of mine who owned the local organic grocery store stopped me and told me she thought she could help my condition. I sneered at her with my pain and arrogance until she gave me the best sales pitch of my life; “what do you have to lose other than pain and a few bucks?”. I left her store after Mass with an investment to protect, taking her recommended supplements faithfully to see if it would give any improvement.

Six weeks later I dropped my toothbrush. I was brushing my teeth when I realized that I was now standing up straight without pain! The pain had slowly imperceptibly receded until it was gone! Was this a miracle? I was amazed! Were my prayers answered with a miracle or was there really something to what she’d told me?

Luckily, I had the perfect “lab” to use to put this theory to the test! A busy practice! (We call it the “practice of medicine” for a reason!)

I printed up the list of all of the supplements I had been taking as well as the doses recommended (attached below) and started my OA patients on it. It didn’t work... for the nicotine users in my practice. Pretty much everybody else got good results however. Each cigarette has about 500 toxins in it. The supplements used to take care of the OA tend to work in a certain priority;

toxins need to be cleared before healing can occur. The nutrients were being used up in detoxifying before there was much success with healing.

When was the last time you saw a toddler on the playground walking around with a cane? I've never seen it. It turns out that we have the genetic blueprint, the DNA to make good healthy collagen and cartilage. OA & spinal disc disease happen when those healthy tissues are damaged. Over time these insults compound upon one another.

Spinal discs are made of an envelope of thick collagen fibers that are interwoven. A healthy disc has a collagen consistency like sailcloth. It's a tough, durable, flexible fabric that contains an interior of soft shock-absorbing gelatinous material, the nucleus pulpous. With aging, the tissues degrade. The outer envelope begins to weaken and bulge or tear with stress as the collagen fibers break. The nucleus pulpous dries out and becomes more brittle.

I've had opportunities to assist in the operating room and observe these tissue changes personally. Smokers tend to have weak collagen. Think of wet tissue paper replacing strong sailcloth. No wonder problems develop! Supplements taken by those who continue to abuse tobacco are so busy trying to detoxify the constant onslaught of poisons, no healing can occur. It is also important to understand how the biochemistry of these agents work. While it'd be nice to get a ticket to a show by Mick Jagger it wouldn't be anything like getting a ticket to see the entire Rolling Stones. Chemistry is like that. If one item is taken to try to heal, disappointment will be sure to follow. If low doses are used the same disappointment will follow again.

I grew up in a coastal resort area. There were many big expensive yachts on the waterways. Those boat owners knew that about once a year there would be an expensive trip to the boat yard. A certain amount of money and effort is required on a weekly basis to maintain these beautiful vessels against the adverse effects of sun and salt. Once a year however the boat would be pulled out of the water for a week or more for more thorough maintenance and repairs. The bottom would be painted, rotted wood would be pulled out, replaced and finished, corroded metal parts would be replaced. These are always big undertakings.

Your body is more beautiful and complex than the nicest of those yachts and requires similar attention. The good news is that we won't be going after you with barnacle scrapers and power tools!

It's essential to supply your body with high doses of the supplements listed below. You have the genetic blueprint for healthy collagen and cartilage. Decades of use and sometimes abuse have done damage that will be repaired if the correct amount and proportions of raw materials are provided in the face of good healthy living

### **Osteo-Arthritis Complementary & Alternative Medicine:**

Mild early-morning stiffness, stiffness following periods of rest, pain that worsens on joint use, and loss of joint function Local tenderness, soft tissue swelling, joint crepitus, bony swelling, restricted mobility, Heberden's nodes, and other signs of degenerative loss of articular cartilage X ray findings (narrowed joint spaces, cartilage erosion, bone spurs, etc.)

#### **QUICK REVIEW**

- Osteoarthritis can be halted and even reversed.

- Aspirin and similar drugs may actually contribute to osteoarthritis by inhibiting cartilage repair.
- Nightshade family vegetables, such as tomatoes, potatoes, and eggplants, may trigger osteoarthritis in some cases.
- Antioxidants protect against osteoarthritis.
- Glucosamine sulfate is the most thoroughly researched and most effective natural approach to osteoarthritis. Head-to-head studies using arthritis drugs have shown that glucosamine sulfate produces better results without side effects.
- Chondroitin sulfate and cartilage preparations are poorly absorbed.
- Physical therapy and exercise can help relieve osteoarthritis.
- Topically applied menthol or capsaicin preparations can help reduce the pain of osteoarthritis.

## TREATMENT SUMMARY

Although glucosamine sulfate has proven remarkably effective on its own, the comprehensive treatment recommended here is based on reducing joint stress and trauma, promoting cartilage repair mechanisms, and eliminating foods and other factors that may inhibit normal cartilage repair. Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs such as aspirin, should be avoided as much as possible. If NSAIDs must be used, deglycyrrhizinated licorice (DGL) should be used to help protect the gastrointestinal tract from their damaging effects, and their use should be discontinued as soon as possible. (For information on DGL, see ULCERS).

## Diet

- All simple, processed, and concentrated carbohydrates must be avoided. Complex carbohydrate, high-fiber foods should be emphasized, and fats should be kept to a minimum. Plants of the nightshade family should be eliminated (tomatoes, potatoes, eggplant, peppers, and tobacco). Flavonoid-rich berries or extracts should be liberally consumed.
- **Nutritional Supplements**
- CMO (Cetyl myristoleate) is an "arthritis immuizer" composed of a fatty acid ester that actually restores normal joint function. It is found in mice, beavers and sperm whale oil. Currently it's manufactured but still retains its amazing ability to heal arthritic joints within a few months. It seems to alter the immune systems response to inflamed joints to promote healing instead of further damage. It's taken as 60 mg 3 capsules three times daily.
- Glucosamine sulfate: 1,500 mg per day
- Niacinamide (optional): 500 mg six times per day (under strict supervision; liver enzyme must be regularly checked). Niacin works better if high Triglycerides/low HDL are a concern but it MUST be taken with adequate Vitamin C, typically half as much Vitamin C at each dose.
- Vitamin E: 400-800 IU per day Vitamin A: 5,000 IU per day Vitamin B6: 50 mg per day
- Pantothenic acid: 12.5 mg per day Zinc: 30-45 mg per day B complex 100 mg three times daily
- Vitamin C to saturation, 2,000-10,000 mg daily in divided doses (just under dose that causes diarrhea)
- Copper: 1-2 mg per day
- Boron: 6 mg per day
- Glucosamine SO4 500 mg three times daily for 6 months
- Omega3 fatty acids 2 gm twice daily to start, the pain/inflammation can be thought of as an EPA (one of the fatty acid family) deficiency, it's hard to get "too much" EPA fatty acid intake

other than the "fish burp" that may accompany it. Flavored liquid forms or freezing the gels helps reduce the side effect.

- Raw food/cultured dairy products such as cheese/yogurt
- MSM up to 5 capsules 4 times daily

• Homeopathic Remedies;

• Rhus tox (works better for Blood type O) and/or Arnica montana (available topically as well as pellets that dissolve under the tongue as with Rhus tox) also can be helpful in relieving arthritic/inflammatory complaints. These are available at better "health food stores".

• Botanical Medicines

• Alfalfa (*Medicago sativa*) (optional): equivalent to 5-10 g per day

• Yucca leaves (optional): 2-4 grams three times per day

• Devil's claw (*Harpagophytum procumbens*) (optional): Dried powdered root: 1-2 grams three times per day Tincture (1:5): 4-5 ml three times per day Dry solid extract (3:1): 400 mg three times per day

#### Topical Treatments

Menthol-based creams or creams containing 0.025 percent or 0.075 percent capsaicin can be applied to affected areas up to four times per day.

Physical Therapy and Exercise Physical activity that overly strains the joint must be avoided.

Chiropractic and other techniques that aid in the normalization of posture, as well as orthopedic correction of structural abnormalities, should be utilized to limit joint strain.

Daily non-traumatic exercise (walking, isometrics, or swimming) is important but should be carefully monitored.

Short-wave diathermy, hydrotherapy, and other physical therapy modalities that improve joint perfusion are recommended.