Pain, stiffness, and swelling, oh my! Did you know that arthritis affects as many as 60 million US adults? According to the Arthritis Foundation, it is the nation’s leading cause of disability. There are over 100 different types of arthritis that can damage the joints. The most common type is osteoarthritis. Anyone can get arthritis, but it often comes about with age. There is no cure, yet it can be managed through a healthy, well-balanced diet, staying active, and taking medications prescribed by your doctor.

Osteoarthritis happens when tissues in joints break down over time. It most often occurs in the hands, hips, knees, neck and lower back. Common symptoms include pain, redness, swelling, warmth, and decreased range of motion. Age, gender and family genes can influence if and when you develop arthritis. Lifestyle also plays a role. Those that are overweight or obese are at an increased risk due to extra weight placed on the joints – especially the hips and knees. Even a person’s job can cause “wear & tear” if it is physically demanding. Those that smoke tobacco or drink alcohol have a higher chance of developing arthritis as these habits can cause swelling in the body.
Arthritis, continued

There is no miracle diet for arthritis, but certain foods can help with swelling and joint pain if eaten as part of an overall healthy diet. Some foods have the opposite effect and can make symptoms worse if eaten too often. Foods to be mindful of when trying to ease joint pain:

- Added Sugars
- Saturated Fats (Beef, lamb, pork, poultry, full-fat dairy products, coconut or palm oils)
- Trans Fats (Fried foods, shelf stable baked goods, frozen pizza, cookies, crackers, margarine)
- Omega-6 Fatty Acids (found in oils such as peanut, soy, grapeseed, corn, safflower)

Following a Mediterranean diet may help with symptoms often associated with arthritis, such as pain and swelling. Recommended by the American Heart Association, this diet can also help lower chances of getting heart disease and stroke, control blood sugar and blood pressure levels, and reduce swelling and joint pain caused by arthritis. This lifestyle choice focuses on plant-based foods such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, nuts and seeds, along with lean proteins like fish, seafood, and moderate amounts of poultry, dairy and eggs. Many Americans do not eat enough seafood. The Mediterranean diet is high in seafood including at least two 4 ounce servings per week and up to 16 ounces. Healthy fats in seafood and oils like olive oil, are one of the primary reasons this diet is thought to reduce arthritis associated pain and inflammation. The Mediterranean diet also limits red meats and processed foods which may contribute to inflammation.

There are also spices that research suggests, but does not prove, decrease swelling associated with arthritis such as garlic, turmeric, ginger, green tea, cinnamon and cayenne. These spices can be added to any of your favorite foods. Some ideas include: cinnamon oatmeal, green tea with ginger root, garlic & cayenne roasted vegetables, turmeric added to whole grains, soups or stews. At this time, it is not suggested to use supplements to get more of these spices in your diet.

If you have arthritis, you are not alone. It can be painful and exhausting, especially if you have other health issues such as diabetes or heart conditions. Per the CDC, 1 in 5 US adults with arthritis have symptoms of anxiety or depression. It is important to consider mental health an important role in managing your arthritis symptoms. People often feel isolated which can lead to anxiety, depression, and decreased quality of life. Remember to reach out to family, friends, support groups and your doctor when feeling worried, sad, or hopeless.

The reality is, what you eat impacts your joints. While there is no magic potion, a Mediterranean style diet is a good lifestyle choice when trying to control pain. Take note if certain foods cause flare-ups so you can be aware of them. Add spices to your favorite recipes, hot teas or smoothies.

Whether you are trying to lose weight, reduce pressure on your joints, or consume more anti-inflammatory foods, UGA Extension can help you in finding new, healthy recipes, exercise ideas and mindful eating tools. If you need more specific advice tailored to you, contact a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist or your health care provider.
Make it a habit

Think about a habit you have. Whether it’s biting your nails, putting an item in the recycle bin, or humming as you go about your daily chores, habits are often things we do while barely thinking about it. Others may take a little more intentionality, like going for a walk after dinner or eating our vegetables first. Habits can be very hard to break, or hard to get started. Here are a few tips on how to make those healthful habits a seamless part of your routine.

**Know your why:** think about why you want to start the new habit. How will it benefit you? How does this habit tie in with your life? You may sit down for a few minutes, close your eyes, and visualize what your life will look like when you establish this habit. Take it a step further and write it down. Seeing a thought in writing can help it feel more real.

**Focus on an action:** be specific. Be sure to define what it is that you want to do and not just an outcome you want to happen. For example, taking a standing break for one to two minutes every hour. You can easily determine if this goal has been completed or not.

**Brainstorm barriers:** In what ways may it be difficult? What barriers will you encounter and how will you handle them? Anticipating barriers can help you be more prepared to tackle them when the time comes.

**Tell a friend:** find a buddy to support you. Accountability and a sense of shared purpose can help a habit stick. It can also be very useful to have someone to talk about successes and challenges with.

**Find someone with similar interests or concerns such as a friend, coworker, or someone in an online group. Have a conversation about how you can support each other.**

**Tie it in:** stack a habit with an existing one. One example is brushing your teeth. If you brush your teeth each morning and evening without fail, use this to anchor a newer habit like drinking a glass of water or a few minutes of lifting hand weights afterwards. Lots of people have a daily habit of watching television to relax in the evening. Try storing a yoga mat near the tv and use the commercial breaks for stretching, basic bodyweight exercises, or even deep breathing. Stacking a new habit with an existing one is a great way to harness the momentum of a strong habit to support building a new one.
This can reduce your overall fat and/or saturated fat intake which can help with weight management and reducing heart disease risk. Deep fried foods commonly have breading or another starchy coating to create that crispy crust when fried in oil.

Since air frying can achieve a crispy exterior without breading or coating, air fried foods tend to be lower in fat and calories than deep fried. Baking, broiling, grilling, and steaming are all lower fat cooking methods that can be used to prepare meals without special equipment. An air fryer may complement these methods and be an alternative to deep frying to produce crispy foods.

Many types of food can be prepared in an air fryer, from vegetables to lean proteins like chicken, fish, or tofu. Flash frozen foods, like frozen chicken nuggets or frozen potato products, tend to cook well in air fryers. Keep in mind that if the product you are buying has already been battered and deep fried prior to freezing, it may not be a low fat or low carbohydrate food.

Air fryers typically come in one of two countertop appliance styles; a toaster oven style model or a bucket style model. The toaster oven style model may offer numerous functions like toasting, roasting, or dehydrating while the bucket style model tends to stick with air frying only. In both models, there is typically an interior metal basket that allows food to be spread out evenly while hot air circulates. As a bonus, the basket lets excess fat drip off of the food. Most air fryers have a smaller capacity than ovens or deep fryers so they may not be the best option for feeding a crowd.

(Continued on page 5)
Some ovens come with a convection setting which are increasingly also being marketed as an air fry setting. Check your oven's features before spending money on a countertop model. Air fryers are sold at a wide range in price depending on available features. Prices range from about $70 up to several hundred dollars for models with more features.

Recipes using air fryers will require adjustments in temperatures and cooking times when compared to conventional oven instructions. When thinking about purchasing an air fryer, take into consideration factors like available counter space, the types of foods you will be preparing, and your budget. An air fryer can be a useful kitchen tool to enhance a nutritious diet by reducing the amount of fat needed to prepare foods. Be mindful to incorporate a variety of food preparation techniques like baking, grilling, and steaming as well as being sure to include plenty of non-starchy vegetables and lean proteins in your meals.
References


Dear Friend,

Diabetes Life Lines is a quarterly publication sent to you by your local county Extension Agent. It is written by an Extension Nutrition and Health Specialist and other health professionals from the University of Georgia. This newsletter brings you timely information on diabetes self-management, nutritious recipes, and news about important diabetes-related events.

If you would like more information, please contact your local county Extension Office.

Yours Truly,

County Extension Agent