



# Alternative Therapies For The Treatment Of Osteoarthritis

BY MICHELLE FERCHOFF

**A**rthritis affects joints, as well as parts of the joints such as, cartilage, synovium, tendons, and muscles. When a person has arthritis, each of these areas can be affected in some way.

There are over 100 different types of arthritis and related diseases that affect the lives of thousands. Major forms of arthritis include osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis.

## **OSTEOARTHRITIS:**

Osteoarthritis (OA), or degenerative joint disease, is one of the most common types of arthritis. Affected patients develop joint pain, with no inflammation. OA is chiefly a disorder of articular cartilage, which is composed of collagen and proteoglycans. When the chondrocytes' ability to rebuild and repair articular cartilage is exceeded, OA develops. OA manifests with the degeneration and loss of articular cartilage and the growth of osteophytes. OA has an affinity for weight bearing joints, and commonly affects middle-aged and older people. Almost everyone over the age of 75 has radiographic evidence of OA in at least one joint.

Although the exact cause of OA is unknown, load stressors like obesity and impact sports, conditions that alter joint mechanics like hip dislocations or previous joint injuries, metabolic conditions like hemochromatosis, acromegly, calcium pyro-phosphate dehydrate crystal deposition disease, and achondrogenesis, and alterations in collagen genes, appear capable of alter-

ing cartilage or subchondral bone, causing OA.

Physicians make a diagnosis of OA based on a physical exam and history of symptoms. X-rays are used to confirm this diagnosis.

Conventional treatment of osteoarthritis focuses on decreasing pain and improving joint movement through exercise, many different medications to control pain, including corticosteroids and NSAIDs, and surgery, to relieve chronic pain in damaged joints.

Alternative treatment of osteoarthritis focuses on improving joint movement and joint health, joint protection to prevent strain or stress on painful joints, weight control to prevent extra stress on weight-bearing joints, and decreasing pain:

## **Vitamins:**

Vitamin B5-required for the synthesis of cartilage.

Vitamin B6-required for the synthesis of cartilage.

Vitamin C-important in collagen and connective tissue repair.

Vitamin E-required for the synthesis of collagen.

## **Minerals:**

Boron-decreased levels found in OA.

Copper-required for the synthesis of collagen.

Zinc-required for the synthesis of collagen.

## **Amino Acids:**

Methionine-important in the maintenance of cartilage.

## **Other:**

Glucosamine-precursor to articular cartilage, component of collagen.

Chondroitin-component of collagen.

Essential fatty acids-anti-inflammatory.

Bromelain-anti-inflammatory, reduces swelling.

## **Herbal medicines:**

Celery seed contains essential oils, flavonoids, and other substances which maintain and support healthy joints.

Nettle leaf contains flavonol glycosides, vitamins, minerals, silicon and other compounds to promote healthy skin and bones, support healthy response to environmental stresses, and maintain and support healthy joints.

Black cohosh contains triterpene glycosides, isoflavones, resin and other compounds that work together to promote the body's normal resistance function and maintain and support healthy joints.

Ginger contains an essential oil and other compounds which help promote healthy circulation, support a healthy response to environmental stresses, and maintain and support healthy joints.

White willow contains salicylates which support musculoskeletal system health, promote relaxation in muscle tissue, and maintain and support healthy joints.

California poppy contains alkaloids, flavonoids, and other compounds that work together to help

support the body's ability to cope with normal environmental stress, enhance the ability to relax during the night, and ease the discomfort caused by exercise related aches and pains.

**Lifestyle:**

In addition, treatment most often involves some combination of exercise, rest, joint protection, and physical and occupational therapy. A balance of rest and exercise can help conserve energy and maintain range of motion and use of the joints.

Osteoarthritis can be managed, but the real goal is prevention. There is no cure for osteoarthritis, only palliation. There is much you can do to protect and fortify your joints.

Reduce repetitive strain on muscles and joints. Repetitive strain can create microtrauma to joints and adja-

cent soft tissue, and lead to osteoarthritis in later years.

A sedentary lifestyle makes for weak muscles and increases the odds of developing arthritis. Regular exercise is essential. It creates stronger and more flexible joints. The use of weights builds denser bones and strengthens the muscles, ligaments, and tendons associated with joints.

Loose weight. Overweight and obese individuals are at greater risk for osteoarthritis, particularly in the weight-bearing joints.

Drinks lots of water. Water makes up 70 percent of the cartilage in joints and plays a major role in the lubrication and shock absorbing properties of healthy joints.

Yoga for flexible joints. Research indicates that yoga generates beneficial mechanical pressures on

joints.

Incorporating as many joint-friendly strategies as possible, along with a healthy lifestyle and supplementation, will reduce the likelihood of developing osteoarthritis.

*About The Author*

*Michele Ferchoff earned her B.S. in biology from the University Wisconsin, La Crosse and then attended the Southwest College of Naturopathic Medicine and Health Sciences, one of four accredited naturopathic medical schools in the country, where she graduated as a N.M.D. in 2002. Michele has several years of practical and clinical experience. She was selected as one of two residents for the National College of Naturopathic Medicine/Standard Process residency program, the first naturopathic residency in Wisconsin's history, beginning in September 2002. Michele is one of only five naturopathic physicians in Wisconsin who have graduated from a four-year accredited naturopathic medical school.*

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D.C. Products Review  
From the May/June 2003 Issue  
<http://www.dcproductsreview.com>