



## Vitamins can help ease pain in joints

If you live with chronic joint pain, then the recent recalls and warnings about anti-inflammatory drugs such as Vioxx (rofecoxib), Celebrex (celecoxib), Bextra (valdecoxib) and Aleve (naproxen) may have put a serious damper on your Christmas. But this news doesn't have to ruin your New Year.

Everyone's chronic joint pain and overall health risks vary, and the benefits of these drugs might still outweigh the risks for you. But if you have decided (along with your physician) to consider alternatives to these drugs, there are many things to consider.

Preventing joint problems is often easier than fixing them. But once a problem exists, proper nutrition is essential to keep it from getting worse.

**Question:** What are the factors that help to keep joints in reasonably good shape as we age?

**Answer:** There are two key factors to consider for joint health:

» To avoid frictional damage, joints require adequate cartilage and synovial fluid. Cartilage covers and cushions the ends of bones at the joints. Synovial fluid provides the lubrication in the joints to prevent mechanical damage.

» Keeping body weight under

control helps to reduce the load on weight-bearing joints and decreases the risk of problems developing.

**Q:** How can dietary choices help?

**A:** Maintaining or regenerating healthy cartilage and synovial fluid requires adequate amounts of multiple nutrients. Taking a daily vitamin/mineral supplement that meets 100 percent of your recommended dietary allowances (RDA) is a good start. Don't be tempted to megadose without guidance from a health professional. Dr. Norman Goldstein, dermatologist and editor of the Hawaii Medical Journal, has seen several serious cases of vitamin A overdose in people who thought more is always better. Not true!

Adequate daily intake of protein and water can be essential to maintain good levels of synovial fluid. Individual needs vary due to body weight, calorie intake, and amount and type of exercise.

To meet daily protein needs, a good rule of thumb is to consume 4 to 5 grams of protein for each 10 pounds of body weight (6 to 7 grams for low-calorie diets). Three ounces of lean meat, poultry or fish contains 20 to 25 grams of protein. One 8-ounce cup of milk has 8

grams, and yogurt has 10 to 12 grams. A half-cup of tofu or beans has 7 to 10 grams, and an ounce of nuts has 5 to 7 grams.

Drinking at least 2 quarts of fluid a day is important. The thirst mechanism becomes less sensitive as people age. Being thirsty and dehydrated is hard on joints.

Omega-3 fatty acids can benefit joints. Good food sources include fatty fish such as salmon, herring and sardines. Plant sources include flaxseed oil, walnuts and canola oil. Supplemental fish oils or algae oil also provide omega-3 fatty acids and generally show more benefit than plant-oil sources.

If you don't get much exposure to sunshine, make sure that you have a good source of vitamin D in your diet or take supplements. Adequate vitamin C is important, too, so don't forget plenty of fruits and vegetables. Vitamin E up to 400 international units (IU) per day might also help.

Next week, "Health Options" will discuss other supplements and herbal alternatives for chronic joint pain

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