

Natural relief for the pain

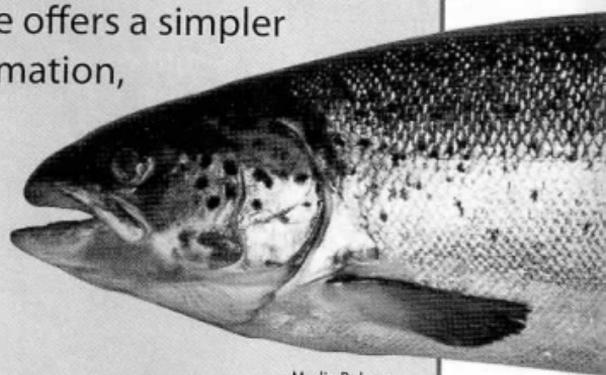
The first line of defense for osteoarthritis is often the medicine cabinet, but you might want to consider the kitchen, or a walk around the park, instead.

Although there is no cure for the wear and tear of aging joints, the key to relieving stiffness and pain is reducing inflammation in the area. Traditional medicine has addressed this problem through NSAIDs, the popular pain relievers that are a staple in many homes. While they are effective, long-term use of these powerful medicines can lead to stomach problems, ulcers and even liver damage. Fortunately, for the millions in pain, Mother Nature offers a simpler approach to inflammation, through a host of healthy foods and herbs.

"Foods such as coldwater fish (omega-3), flaxseed (gamma linolenic acid, or GLA), pineapple (bromelain), Indian dishes (turmeric), ginger and garlic, have been shown to have anti-inflammatory effects in clinical studies," says Nathan Wei, director of the Arthritis Treatment Center in Frederick, Md.

Likewise, avoiding processed, packaged foods high in saturated fat and sugar can help to calm inflammation. Opt for whole, fresh, organic fruits and vegetables, nuts and seeds, grass-fed beef, and omega-3-rich eggs. Foods and beverages high in antioxidants, like tart cherries and green tea, are also known to keep inflammation at bay. Additionally, it's important to get an ample amount of vitamin C, which helps to form healthy cartilage, and vitamin D, a deficiency of which is associated with joint pain.

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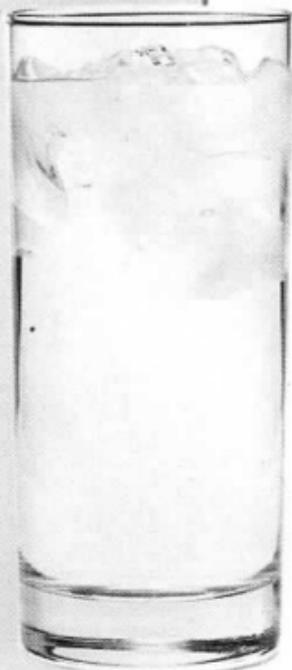
Also, drinking six to eight cups of water a day is helpful. Water is the body's internal lubricant, keeping tissues and joints pliable.

Nutritional supplements offer natural pain relief, too. Glucosamine and chondroitin sulfate, among the most popular in use today, have been extensively researched. Although large studies haven't proved their efficacy, earlier findings indicated that 1,500 mg of glucosamine plus 1,200 mg of chondroitin sulfate offered some pain relief for certain individuals. Other supplements showing promise for joint health and pain relief include Sam-e (600 to 1200 mg), MSM (1000 to 3000 mg) and omega-3 fish oil (EPA/DHA, 1000 mg). Since natural supplements can be as potent as medications, consult with your doctor or pharmacist before taking them.

One of the best pieces of advice may be the hardest to follow: "use it or lose it." When joints are painful and swollen, exercise is generally the last thing on one's mind, yet it is essential to joint health. Gentle, regular exercises such as walking, swimming, yoga and tai chi are all effective at keeping joints mobile. Daily exercise also contributes to weight loss, which reduces the pressure on weight-bearing joints.

Finally, meditation, hypnosis and warm baths – called hydrotherapy – are also helpful, natural ways to ease pain.

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