



## Eating Well

The saying ‘you are what you eat’ is true. Research shows that the decisions you make about what and how you eat can have a profound impact on your overall health and wellness, both mentally and physically – not to mention the way you and your body are prepared to cope with arthritis symptoms.

### Key Points:

1. Most general dietary recommendations for healthy eating apply equally well to people living with arthritis.
2. Small changes you make to embrace healthy eating habits can make an incremental improvement to your overall health, and in turn improve your ability to live well with arthritis.
3. Consult with your physician and, where possible, with a registered dietitian. Before you start a new food program, remember that your body needs protein for stamina, and healthy fats for energy and to metabolize nutrients. Your calorie intake is also important — if you restrict your calorie intake too much your metabolism can slow down, leading to fatigue and foggy thinking.
4. These recommendations are not about “dieting” or eating specifically to lose weight: while some people with arthritis are carrying more weight than is good for their joints, other people with certain conditions or taking certain medications may have trouble keeping weight on.
5. The goal is to make healthy nutrition choices about what, when and how you eat, giving your body the fuel and building blocks you need to stay active and feel good.
6. Start with a few small changes, such as adding a few more vegetables and fruits to your regular daily intake, staying hydrated, or even just switching to a whole grain bread.
7. Start your own food and mood journal to help you keep track of what you eat and how you feel afterwards — having something to refer to can better help you understand what is working. Download our Food and Mood Tracker to help you figure out what works for you. It can be used in conjunction with our Daily Symptom Tracker to track your symptoms.  
<https://arthritis.ca/getmedia/e26aa520-cefa-4890-a747-5d7918492aca/EN-food-and-mood-tracker.pdf>
8. Eliminating Foods: There seems to be an endless stream of advice about what foods you should stay away from if you have arthritis. For example, plants in the nightshade family (tomatoes, peppers, eggplant) have often been considered foods to avoid, but current scientific research doesn’t support this approach. Source: <https://arthritis.ca/living-well/2021/nightshades-and-arthritis>

The only way to really tell if you’re sensitive to a particular food is to try eliminating it from your diet. However, before you decide to eliminate anything from your diet, talk to your healthcare professional about your plans, and don’t forget to keep track of how you feel. Afterwards, try adding the foods that were giving you trouble back into your diet and note any changes in your Food and Mood tracker.

**Source: Arthritis Society: Food to the Rescue: Using Food to Manage Inflammation, 2016**

## General guidelines: What to eat

The first step towards good health is to follow the advice found in [Canada's Food Guide](#). It's a comprehensive tool designed to help people get the most from their daily food intake.

**Health Canada** also has a lot of other helpful resources, including recipes, shopping tips and meal planning ideas. <https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/tips-for-healthy-eating>

## Specific Guidelines: What to eat



### Reduce your unhealthy fat intake

- Eat fish and skinless poultry more often than red meats, and prepare some meatless meals.
- Bake, steam, microwave, broil or grill more often than frying.
- Choose lean cuts of meat and trim off visible fat before cooking.
- Fill up on vegetables, fruits and whole grain bread and cereals. Limit butter, hard margarine, lard and shortening. Use canola, olive or soybean oil instead.
- Check the label of packaged foods and look at the amount of fat and sugars before making your choice. For example, pick pretzels more often than chips.



### Increase your good fats

Polyunsaturated fats (omega-3 and omega-6 fats from fish like mackerel and salmon, and nuts and seeds like walnut and flax) and monounsaturated fats (canola and olive oil, almonds and cashews) are the healthiest choices. Sprinkle flax on your oatmeal, whisk up your own salad dressing with olive oil, eat fish twice a week and choose omega-3 enriched products like eggs and milk.



### Boost your fruits and veggies

You may have grown up eating vegetables as only a small side dish, but experts now say that at least half your plate should be vegetables, and you should have fruit at every meal or snack. Vegetables and fruit are a great source of energy as well as fibre, which will help you to manage your weight. Orange vegetables (carrots, sweet potatoes) and dark green vegetables (broccoli, spinach, kale) are packed with the most nutrients. Try to eat some every day. Brightly coloured fruits and vegetables like berries and tomatoes tend to be high in nutrients too.

### Reference: The Eat Well Plate, Government of Canada

<https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/tips-for-healthy-eating/make-healthy-meals-with-the-eat-well-plate/>



### Pick your protein

Lean protein helps your body repair damage and helps to keep your immune system functioning properly. Choose chicken, seafood, beans, tofu, legumes, nuts and seeds more often.



### Watch your sugar

The kind of foods you eat play a big role in your energy levels. No doubt you've noticed that a snack high in sugar gives you a quick spike in energy. But you may also have noticed that later on your energy crashes and you feel sluggish. Added sugars like honey and agave are no healthier than white sugar and brown sugar. Look at the nutrition facts panel in the ingredient list to compare products and choose foods with less sugar.

### Reference: Canada Food Guide and Dieticians of Canada

## Resource list

### General Resources:



- **Arthritis Society Canada:**  
<https://arthritis.ca/support-education/online-learning/eating-well>  
(for information regarding what to eat, what to drink, supplements, food and mood, food tracker).
- **Understanding Food Labels:**  
<https://arthritis.ca/living-well/2022/understanding-nutrition-labels-on-food-when-you-have-arthritis>
- **Anti-inflammatory Meal Prep for Beginners:**  
<https://arthritis.ca/living-well/2022/anti-inflammatory-meal-prep-for-beginners>
- **Dietitians of Canada:**  
<https://www.dietitians.ca/> and <https://www.unlockfood.ca/en/default.aspx> for tips on healthy eating, fiber, BMI calculator
- **Health Connect Ontario:**  
Call 811 or 1-866-797-0000 (press 3 for dietitian after selecting language). Go to <https://healthconnectontario.health.gov.on.ca/> and select Chat With Us under Get Health Advice to request to speak with a Registered Dietician.
- **2019 Canada Food Guide:** <https://food-guide.canada.ca/>
- **10 Steps to a Balanced Plate:** <https://cms.ahpa.ca/imports/resources/150910025845-10-steps-to-a-balanced-plate.pdf> (link will open PDF document).
- **Osteoporosis Canada:** [www.osteoporosis.ca](http://www.osteoporosis.ca)

### Weight Management:



- **Arthritis Advice: Nutrition:**  
<https://arthritis.ca/living-well/2020/arthritis-advice-nutrition>
- **Weight management for OA:**  
<https://arthritis.ca/living-well/2019/can-decreasing-weight-decrease-pain-here-s-what-you-need-to-know>
- **Obesity Canada:** <https://obesitycanada.ca/>
- **Ontario Bariatric Network:** <https://www.ontariobariatricnetwork.ca/>
- **Over Eaters Anonymous:** <https://oa.org/>

### Supplements:



- **Using supplements to Treat Arthritis:**  
<https://arthritis.ca/living-well/2018/using-supplements-to-treat-arthritis>
- **Alberta Rheumatology: Supplements and natural health products:**  
<https://albertarheumatology.com/natural-health-products/>