

Michael van Straten's Bodytalk

on

Classic Gold

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Natural help for joint problems with Nature's remedies from Goldshield

This week we focus on a problem that affects 7 million people, one child in every 1000 and is the second most common reason for taking time off work. If you haven't guessed, its arthritis – and I bet most of you didn't know that. No matter how severe it is, there are natural steps you can take to help with the symptoms. Diet, exercise, herbal remedies and complementary therapies can all contribute to better well being, improved mobility and less pain. Whether it is an old injury, wear and tear, rheumatoid arthritis or gout, you'll find some help here.

Joint problems are universal and few people will live their lives without some disorder. They're nothing new, ancient skeletons have been found with osteoarthritis, and now archaeologists tell us that even Tyrannosaurus Rex probably suffered from gout.

Arthritis means joint inflammation and there are more than 200 different types, the most common being osteoarthritis, through gout, rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, ankylosing spondylitis, spondylosis, bunions. In the UK alone 7 million people are affected by arthritis each year. Two thirds of them suffer pain and discomfort every day and arthritis is the most common reason that professional athletes give up their sport.

In all forms of arthritis food would seem to play a major part. Eating the right things (see list) has both a protective and a therapeutic effect, eating the wrong ones can greatly aggravate symptoms and may even be a causative factor. There is also the possibility that some allergic reactions to food and food additives might be to blame.

Of course there are many other reasons for joint problems, including a variety of sports and there's no doubt that lots of people are galvanised back on to the tennis court after watching Wimbledon. Thanks to the World Cup plenty of unaccustomed joints and muscles will be kicking the occasional football round the park or garden, and of course summer brings a spate of joint-straining gardening, decorating and other DIY repairs.

Most people with tennis elbow have never played the game. It's caused by inflammation of one of the tendon's that works the fingers and wrist where it joins on to the funnybone on the outside of the elbow. It happens because of unaccustomed repetitive use, painting and decorating, polishing, washing down walls, removing wallpaper, pruning the roses - all things which you don't do very often, unless you're a professional. Osteopathic treatment and acupuncture are the therapies which help most. To make sure you get a reputable practitioner, ask your GP's advice.

If the pain is on the inside of the elbow, then it's golfer's elbow. Generally treatment will be the same. Another wonder for pains of this type is cabbage leaves. Great for arthritic and joint pain – warm a bruised cabbage leaf on a pipe or in an oven for a short while and wrap it around the affected area, then cover with a tea towel.

A little self massage with a drop of cooking oil and your thumb around the painful area will all help. For support the best thing is to go to a sports shop and get a tennis elbow support. This is a wide strap with a buckle and velcro fastener. Wrapped around the forearm below the elbow, it's tightened to support the muscles. Contrast bathing with hot and cold water three times a day - 10 seconds hot, 5 seconds cold, for three minutes - and an ice pack night and morning for 10 minutes, speeds healing. Use a large bag of frozen peas, cover with a thin teacloth and wrap around the elbow.

A thick rubber band and a tennis ball are all the exercise you need. Stretch the band from the outside of your thumb to the outside of your little finger, close to the knuckles, and with your arm resting on a table spread and relax the fingers until they get tired. As it gets easier, move the band up the fingers.

Grip the tennis ball in your palm, squeeze and hold for three seconds, then relax. Carry on until the muscles get tired. You'll do more repetitions with practice. Keep your tennis ball and your rubber band with you constantly and repeat both exercises 10 times daily.

Avoid all activities which hurt and start using the elbow very gently when the pain has stopped.

If backache strikes don't just go to bed and lie there, the latest research shows that two weeks of bed rest can actually make matters worse not better. Even if you're in acute pain, 48 hours is usually enough time to spend at total rest. After that you should start some active treatment and, for most back problems the best thing you can do is to see an osteopath. A tiny percentage of patients do need surgery and unless you're one of these, your best bet is to ask your GP to recommend a local osteopath. These days, GPs and orthopaedic surgeons are happy to advise osteopathic treatment, and all practising osteopaths must now be Members of the Statutory Register of The General Osteopathic Council (tel 020 7357 6655, see www.osteopathy.org.uk).

If you are seriously overweight, the strain on all the spinal joints increases. If you are a back pain victim it's even more urgent to shed some surplus pounds. No crash diets, meal replacements or weird and wonderful pills and potions. Sensible, healthy and enjoyable eating is the only sane way to do it.

If you want to look after your back, choose your car for the seat. Price is seldom a factor - I've driven the most expensive vehicles and been appalled by their seats. Sit in the drivers seat, put your hands on the wheel at ten to two, your feet on the pedals, and see if your arms and legs are pointing straight, or off to the side. The offset pedals and steering wheel in many models will create muscle strain and lead to backache. You must have good lumbar and lateral support and the head restraint should adjust backwards and forwards as well as up and down.

Stiletto heels have made an unwelcome return to the fashion scene. Doc Martens, trainers and flatties may not be glamorous, but they're better for the feet and back. Most of you ladies like to wear fancy shoes, but keep them for special outings, not every day wear.

The shoulder bag is another bane of the back, though few people realise how bad it is. Even empty, the shoulder must be hunched up to stop the strap sliding off. Your posture is altered and you end up with a curved back and the weight in all the wrong places. Just walk behind a group of lady traffic wardens or schoolkids to see what I mean.

Next we look at the problems of pregnancy, posture and gardening. Gardening is great exercise, but use long handled tools, lightweight barrows, a kneeling pad and a small spade. Don't do the same job for hours on end, but have two or three on the go. Switch round every ten minutes to avoid continual strain on the same joints and muscles.

Pregnancy is a time when most women suffer. Don't gain more weight than is good for the baby and keep active - swim, go to aquaerobics, walk, and do the simple exercises that I'll describe in a moment. Make sure you keep your bottom

well tucked in to avoid the protruding backside which hollows your back too much. Osteopathic treatment is a great help right up to the last minute.

Heavy weights should be held close to the chest. A 10 pound baby, lifted out of its cot at arms length because you don't bother to lower the side, exerts five times its weight on your back. Carrying baby on your hip is not much better as the weight is all on one side, so try a sling instead.

Posture makes perfect so look in a full length mirror, to see if your shoulders are level, the buckles on bra straps are the same height and the waist of your knickers even. Stand tall - think of someone pulling your hair straight up, but gently. Broaden the shoulders and lengthen the back and tuck in your tail. It's hard, but easier if you think of rather rude movements!

For detailed advice, get a copy of my book 'Back to Strength' at the special price of £5.00. Send a cheque to Alternative Publications, PO Box 5063, Leighton Buzzard LU7 0ZH.

Osteoarthritis is a degenerative disease of the weight-bearing surfaces of the joints, affecting cartilage and bone. Injury, repetitive use in occupations, sports and hobbies, obesity, heavy manual work, can all be the root cause.

Rheumatoid arthritis affects many joints, often in the extremities. It is an illness which continues over many years, usually starting with general pain, stiffness, tiredness, tingling in the hands and feet, then swellings and increasing deformity. A lifetime of acute phases and remissions is the normal pattern mostly starting around the age of 40, though juvenile rheumatoid arthritis is an ever increasing problem, women are affected three times as much as men and there is frequently a family history.

For rheumatoid arthritis also eat less dairy products, corn, wheat, potatoes, tomatoes, peppers, aubergines (all members of the nightshade family). Food allergies may be a factor for some so it's best to cut them all out and then add them back gradually, and in a matter of weeks it's possible to identify those foods which cause allergic or adverse reactions.

Steroids, NSAIDs (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs), gold injections, joint replacement and fusions, are all part of the orthodox treatment of this rheumatoid disease which may be linked to deficiencies of the immune system.

Eat more salmon, mackerel, herring, trout, sardines, mussels, other shellfish for Omega-3 fatty acids; liver, carrots, broccoli, apricots, sweet potatoes, cantaloupe melon for vitamin A and beta-carotene; sweet peppers, kiwi fruit, oranges, Brussels sprouts, cabbage for vitamin C; avocados, fresh nuts, asparagus,

sunflower seeds, olive oil for vitamin E; white meat, whole grains and cereals, eggs, Brewer's yeast for B vitamins.

Eat less red meat, red wines, fortified wines like sherry, port and Madeira, and large amounts of other alcoholic drinks, game, caffeine, salt and sodium-based food additives

Ginger, turmeric, garlic and cod-liver oil are great natural anti-inflammatories, take the oil as a supplement and use the others liberally in cooking. Ginger makes a delicious and refreshing tea.

Take care with your choice of vegetable oils, the otherwise healthy corn, safflower and sunflower oils can aggravate already inflamed joints, so stick to olive or rape seed.

In the last few years some fascinating new formulations of natural joint care products have become available. Glucosamine and chondroitin are amongst the most effective but when they are sourced from natural origins there is the bonus of other synergistic ingredients. Because glucosamine is not an anti-inflammatory, combining it with celadrin, a mix of five different fatty acids, makes it much more effective. Lubramine G is just that, and provides the advantages of both ingredients in one capsule.

CMO is one of the most fascinating of joint protectors. Originally isolated back in the 1970s and unacknowledged and neglected by the American National Institutes of Health (NOH), rejected by numerous pharmaceutical companies, CMO only saw the light of day when its discoverer, crippled with arthritis, and in desperation took the risk of injecting himself with his own discovery. His doctor was so amazed by the results that a chain reaction was set in motion with the end result that this unique fatty acid – CMO is a short name for this complex but natural chemical substance – is the subject of constant research. It appears to act on the immune system as a natural regulator rather than a suppressor or stimulator of the immune system with all the attendant risks those steroids and NSAIDs have.

Genuine CMO capsules are even more effective when combined with glucosamine. Using Lubramine, a patented mix of five fatty acids based on CMO, all ingredients from nature's pharmacy, provides continuous release of the pain relieving substances plus the healing effects of the glucosamine.

Can food really affect your joints for better or worse? No matter what your age or your state of health, food can make an enormous difference. If you're overweight, the back, hip, knee and ankles all take the strain. One stone extra means 28 x ½ lb packs of lard strapped to your back all the time. If you've got joint problems

they'll be severely aggravated - if you haven't, the chances are you'll get them if you're seriously overweight

Fitness is a combination of strength, stamina and mobility and its loss of mobility that often leads to a decline in strength and stamina, and then to a loss of independence.

The first step is to take good care of your joints, especially the ones in your back, hips and knees. Learn to lift properly - use the leg muscles and keep your back straight. Avoid repetitive and stressful movements, don't carry heavy loads, and do start exercising. If you haven't been out of breath since the school P.E. class - don't start with a one hour aerobics lesson. Be careful of fashionable things like step or slide classes - they're good business for us osteopaths. Start by gentle walking or non-weight bearing activity like cycling and swimming and 5 minutes of gentle stretching a couple of times a day.

Exercise, weight and food all play a vital role, as do some of the natural remedies. But complementary therapies can also be helpful. Osteopathy and Chiropractic - both forms of manipulative treatment - can maintain joint function and improve movement. Remedial exercise restores the muscle strength and Acupuncture can reduce the pain of arthritic joints dramatically.

To me it's a great sadness that massage has acquired such a dubious reputation - everywhere else in the world it's thought of as a wonderful aid to good health. For almost every muscle, joint or ligament problem a good masseur or aromatherapist can work wonders, soothing away aches and pains, getting rid of tension and leaving you with a wonderful sense of well being.

Herbal medicine has a basketful of remedies that stimulate and heal damaged ligaments and muscles, and homoeopathy can also help in the treatment of these problems. Nutritional therapy makes sure you get all the foods that heal, but none of those that harm - as well as supplements - but more about those in a minute.

Whether or not you've got joint problems and whether you're 8 or 80 take a minute to get those joints moving. Start today with some gentle exercises. You don't even need to stand up - just do it anywhere, any time. Repeat each movement 5 times now, increasing to 10 over the next couple of weeks.

Stretching your arms in front of you, open and close your fingers. Now rotate your wrists in each direction, then straighten and bend the elbows.

Now it's time for the legs. Stretch them out in front of you and rotate your ankles in each direction, at the same time bending and stretching the toes. Now bend the knees as far as you can and straighten them, and finally with knees bent, raise them up alternately to flex the hip joints.

Even if you can't swim, exercising in water is both treatment and prevention and aquaerobics classes are available in most local pools. Tension not only makes the pain of arthritic joints worse but shortens muscles and reduces mobility. So start with these simple relaxing movements. Driving, hours at a keyboard or days spent over a desk, work bench, kitchen sink or ironing board, can develop tension in your neck and shoulder muscles.

So, hunch your shoulders right up as far as you can towards your ears, now with your arms by your sides just let them drop with their own weight. No, don't push them down - try again and once you've got the hang of it, repeat 5 times.

To get your neck moving, drop your chin onto your chest and slowly and gently, with shoulders down, stretch the head back without forcing, then forward again. Next, turn your head left, then right, as far as you can. Finally, with the head straight, tip your left ear towards your shoulder without turning the head, repeat to the other side. Do all the movements 5 times.

Do any or all of these simple stretches as often as you can during the day to keep your neck mobile and prevent neck and shoulder pain and headaches. Do them in the office, do them at your school desk, do them in the supermarket queue, do them at the traffic lights - and don't care what anyone thinks!

Finally, let's consider the problems of gout and rheumatoid arthritis. Gout is a serious illness, not the music-hall joke of the Colonel and the bottle of port, though it is true that if you've got gout any red wine and port in particular, will make it worse. Gout is caused by crystals of uric acid in your joints and, in addition to the medicines prescribed by your doctor you must take great care of your diet.

Avoid all foods containing substances called purines, which are offal, yeast extracts, meat extracts, and even oily fish like salmon, sardines, mackerel, herrings, whitebait, sprats, anchovies, mussels, scallops, roe, taramasalata and sadly caviar. Don't eat game and avoid all alcohol. You should eat artichokes, cabbage, broccoli, onions, apples, leeks, bananas and wholemeal bread.

As well as eating the cabbage try this - it really works:- take two or three large outer leaves of dark green cabbage, cut out the thick stalks then bash the leaves all over with a knife handle. Wrap them round a hot water pipe or put them in the oven or microwave to warm up. Then wrap around any inflamed joint and cover with a towel for half an hour. Remember, the worst thing you can do is to do nothing.

Local applications of Flexeze Glucosamine gel and Flexeze spray will both help with local pain and inflammation and Lubramine G, Glucosamine tablets with celadrin fatty acids, and Lubramine on its own, are valuable supplements.

Glucos tablets are a combination of herbal extracts from oregano, green tea, turmeric and rosemary with glucosamine for damaged cartilage and protective antioxidants.

Natural help for Arthritis and other joint problems.

Local applications of Devil's Claw gel

Supplex – green lipped mussel extract

Bromelin pineapple extract – natural inflammatory

Devil's Claw tablets (anti-inflammatory)

MorEPA High Strength Fish Oil – 08700 53 6000

Lubramine is available at chemists and good health stores, Boots, Superdrug or direct from Goldshield Healthcare on www.goldshield.co.uk Tel: 08000 74 74 04