

Mediterranean Diet Reduces Arthritis Pain

Learning how to eat Mediterranean-style may help people with rheumatoid arthritis improve their symptoms, a new study in the “Annals of the Rheumatic Diseases” suggests.

The traditional diets of people in the Mediterranean region tend to be high in fruits, vegetables, fish and olive oil, and comparatively low in red meat. The diet is also typically rich in antioxidants, which help shield body cells from damage. A number of studies have linked this style of eating to a lower risk of heart disease, but there has also been some evidence that it’s beneficial for people with rheumatoid arthritis, or RA.

RA is caused by an errant immune system attack on the lining of the joints, which leads to chronic inflammation, pain and stiffness. Some research has suggested that components of [the Mediterranean diet](#), like the healthy fats in olive oil, have anti-inflammatory effects.

In the new study, UK researchers split 130 women with RA into two groups. One group attended classes on Mediterranean-style eating, which included hands-on cooking instruction. The other group was given written dietary information only.

The researchers found that women who attended the classes bumped up their intake of fruits, vegetables, beans and monounsaturated fat — the type found in olive oil. What’s more, over the next six months they reported improvements in pain, morning stiffness and overall health.

In contrast, women who received only written information made no significant diet changes, as a group. Nor were there any overall symptom improvements, the study found, leaving no doubt that the women benefited from taking the class rather than simply getting written information. The classes seemed to increase participants’ confidence and offered them social interaction as well, according to the lead researcher, Dr. Gayle McKellar and her colleagues. In addition, the women — who were generally from low-income areas — were shown how fresh produce and other healthy foods can fit into their budgets, and how to use kitchen aids to overcome any problems with their hand function.

The researchers are planning follow-up studies with larger groups of subjects and with different diseases.