



Ms Yaso Shan; Health Consultant

Vinings Natural Health Centre, Clover Court, Church Road,
Haywards Heath, West Sussex, RH16 3UF

Tel: +44(0)7817 420118 Email: info@yaso-shan.co.uk

Website: www.yaso-shan.co.uk

A holistic and herbal approach to the management of arthritis

Joint disorders

Joint disorders cover a wide variety of conditions such as arthritis (rheumatoid arthritis and osteoarthritis), gout, lumbago (backache) and osteoporosis. The main joint problem that people commonly experience is arthritis. There are essentially 2 types of arthritis, the type that is caused by 'wear and tear', through age and overuse of a particular joint called osteoarthritis and the type that has an autoimmune basis with complications affecting other organs and systems beyond the joint and this is called rheumatoid arthritis. Both types of arthritis are characterised by joint swelling, pain, tenderness, heat in the joint and loss of mobility. The nodules that are often seen on the hands and other joints of the body is a classic hallmark of arthritis and this is usually the indicator of joint disorders but at this stage it is difficult to distinguish the type.

The herbal approach is to use a combination of herbs that tackle the pain and swelling whilst using internal mixtures to detoxify and cleanse the system in order to reduce the immune challenge that is resulting in inflammation. The long-term aim is to increase mobility and whilst there is no cure for arthritis, the focus is to manage the symptoms whilst improving the lives of many patients through pain management.

Joints and muscles require special attention, especially as we get older because of the risk of injury and symptoms that creep up due to wear and tear. To strengthen bones and connective tissue, horsetail, centella and comfrey can be used. To relax tense and cramped muscles, arnica, cramp bark or valerian can be used. Arnica is also known for its ability to reduce bruising. However, a consultation with a medical herbalist can identify specific areas for attention and they can prescribe the most suitable combination that is individually tailored.

Herbs that are used topically include oil of wintergreen, cayenne pepper or prickly ash in a base cream of chamomile or arnica. Internally, supplements of devil's claw have had profound results as have turmeric and boswellia. Other herbs include white willow bark meadowsweet, prickly ash, nettle, Jamaica dogwood or devil's claw. As in all inflammatory conditions, it is important to look at the immune system since inflammation is very much an

immune response, particularly in rheumatoid arthritis. Modulating the immune responses can be achieved through echinacea. However, liver herbs are equally important and in this respect, herbs such as dandelion and milk thistle are effective. Detoxification of any substances that are challenging the system can be addressed through burdock, cleavers or poke root, given in combination with good circulatory stimulants such as ginkgo to improve elimination. Bowel function is also important; a herbalist should be able to prescribe herbs that will optimise this function so as to prevent the build-up of any waste or toxins in the system that could be the cause of inflammation.

Lifestyle changes such as gentle exercise (swimming and walking are both good for osteoarthritis and it is important to maintain joint mobility by taking exercise rather than letting them stay rigid). Some patients report that taking supplements of glucosamine sulphate and chondroitin sulphate helps as well as a sulphur based compound called MSM. It is best to seek the advice of a herbalist before buying any brand, especially products online which are not always regulated. Climate also helps and patients usually report that their condition significantly improves in the summer months. The key thing is learning to manage the condition and making attempts to be as mobile as possible and being able to do things without the constant agony of pain.

Key herbs for arthritic symptoms

Arnica is a herb that herbalists only use externally and never on broken skin. Commercial preparations containing arnica are usually designed to treat the symptoms of joint and muscular pain, stiffness or injury and it has excellent healing properties too, particularly for bruises since it encourages blood flow to the skin surface. Oil preparations, lotions or creams are usually combined with other herbs such as rosemary oil, lavender oil or silver birch bark oil and sometimes comfrey base cream. Arnica is also good for rheumatism, varicose veins, sprains, muscular aches and pains.

Echinacea is one of those herbs that practically everyone has heard of because we have all experienced the common cold. As a prophylactic for the cold and flu, this herb is excellent and some people swear by it for their general immunity and resistance to infection. It is almost too late to start taking it once symptoms appear so it really is best to take it as a supplement if you are susceptible to recurring colds. It is also used topically for minor infections, cuts & grazes as it is a great antimicrobial and antiseptic. Equally, it is also very good for healing wounds and boosting energy levels in debilitated patients. As a supplement, it is best taken as a standardised extract in capsule or tablet form. For general debility and weakness tinctures are probably better and in combination with other immune boosters, infection-fighting herbs and tonics.

Devil's Claw is a popular herbal supplement taken for the pain and discomfort of arthritis. It is also useful for other joint problems too such as gout and tendonitis. It contains important pain-relieving chemicals as well as anti-inflammatories, both characteristics of arthritic conditions. Many patients find that taking regular supplements of this herb improves mobility and lessens the pain, particularly in chronic cases. Many people who enjoy sporting

activities and regular physical exercise who are hampered by joint injury or pain, find this a useful supplement in managing their symptoms. Devil's claw also has other benefits including being a digestive stimulant (it is one of the bitterest herbs, taken in tincture form). Traditionally of course, it has been used for centuries by native South Africans to stimulate digestion in addition to controlling pain and fever.

Dietary supplements for joint care

- Vitamin D
- Calcium
- Glucosamine
- Chondroitin
- MSM
- Essential Fatty Acids (EFAs)

The importance of Essential Fatty acids

There has been a lot of media coverage on the subject of the essential fatty acids and how good they are for you. We are apparently not getting enough of these nutrients from our diet due to the appalling standards of the 'western diet' having too much of the unhealthy saturated fats, hydrogenated fats and refined sugars. To understand the true importance of essential fatty acids, it is perhaps best to start at a description and their function in the body.

The essential fatty acids (EFAs) are a vital part of our diet because they cannot be made by the body, so they need to be obtained from the diet. In this sense, they are therefore referred to as 'essential'. They are a group of fats (lipids) and make up some of the most important parts of our body especially the brain, hence the term 'brain food'. There are 2 types of essential fatty acids that are important – omega 3 and omega 6. There is also omega 9 but this is not technically essential as the body is capable of making it provided there are enough of the other EFAs in the first place. The EFAs are needed by the body in certain proportions; more is needed of the omega 3 than the 6. Omega 3 is found in flaxseed oil (flaxseed oil has the highest omega 3 content of any food), flaxseeds, flaxseed meal, hempseed oil, hempseeds, walnuts, pumpkin seeds, Brazil nuts, sesame seeds, avocados, some dark leafy green vegetables (kale, spinach, purslane, mustard greens, collards, etc.), canola oil (cold-pressed and unrefined), soybean oil, wheat germ oil, salmon, mackerel, sardines, anchovies, albacore tuna, and others.

Omega 6 is also found in flaxseed oil, flaxseeds, flaxseed meal, hempseed oil and hempseeds. Other sources include grapeseed oil, pumpkin seeds, pine nuts, pistachio nuts, sunflower seeds (raw), olive oil, olives, borage oil, evening primrose oil, black currant seed oil, chestnut oil, chicken, amongst many others. It is important to avoid refined and hydrogenated versions of these foods. Other sources must be checked for quality as they may be nutrient-deficient as sold in stores. These include corn, safflower, sunflower, soybean, and cottonseed oils which are also sources of omega 6, but are refined and may be nutrient-deficient.

Omega 9 is found in olive oil (extra virgin or virgin), olives, avocados, almonds, peanuts, sesame oil, pecans, pistachio nuts, cashews, hazelnuts, macadamia nuts, etc. One to two tablespoons of extra virgin or virgin olive oil per day should provide sufficient omega 9 for adults. However, the "time-released" effects of obtaining these nutrients from nuts and other whole foods is thought to be more beneficial than consuming the entire daily amount via a single oil dose.

For a clear mind, a healthy body and efficient use of energy, the essential fatty acids are a vital part of the diet. They also have other health benefits such as maintaining the suppleness of the joints, offering some protection against heart disease and general all round health. They also ensure a healthy circulation and immune system amongst other important functions that are too many to mention here. There is conflicting information however, as to their usefulness in pregnancy. Concern is really over the mercury levels in fatty fish, which is a good dietary source of omega 3 fatty acid. However, given that EFAs are vital to the growing baby (brain & spinal cord development) so it should not be avoided. If concerned, an alternative choice could be to try vegetarian sources (such as flaxseed or hemp seed oil) or take supplements made from algae sources as these pose no dangers for pregnant women. Taking these supplements in moderation is always the sensible approach and if in doubt, it is best to seek advice from a herbalist or a nutritionist.

Other measures for boosting energy include lymphatic drainage (a type of massage that encourages the free flow of lymph fluid through the lymphatic system enabling the efficient removal of toxins and debris from the system). It is a form of enhanced 'detox' so that toxins do not build up in the cells, tissues or surrounding fluids. Diet is also important in general detox as is eating the right kinds of foods for improved nutritional status, boosting circulation (eg. via exercise) and enabling the body to make better use of energy within cells. This requires de-cluttering the system, eliminating toxins, improving current sluggishness of the liver, improving circulation to the cells so oxygen actually reaches the cells for energy production.

Health as you get older

The health of the elderly warrants a special mention as there are many things that can be done to enhance and prolong health and well-being, well into old age. Many of the problems that are symptomatic of age and decline can be avoided through a healthy diet, a healthy lifestyle and through supplementation. Many physiological functions start to deteriorate and some of the things taken for granted in youth (like having energy for instance) is simply not there anymore. A pragmatic approach to life and accepting one's physical limitations is a good starting point and this will avoid disappointment and a certain frustration that accompanies a state of mind that tries to do more than the body will permit.

Keeping the mind active, keeping physically active (within one's own limitations) and cultivating different skills, hobbies and pastimes will all help in improving the quality of life

as we get older. Western societies place an unnatural and unhealthy emphasis of youth and does not value age and experience. As a consequence, many people worry about old age and start to feel devalued and useless. This is not only unnecessary but also a cruel injustice to a group in our society who have so much to offer by way of wisdom, skills, knowledge and the all important life experience.