

Fight inflammation with food

By Karen Kansler, R.N.

Special to the Review

If you've got arthritis, you may want to declare a "food fight."

Did you know that certain foods can help your body fight off inflammation and infection? Inflammation is our body's natural response to some sort of injury or attack, such as a bump on the head, asthma or the joint pain of arthritis. Medications can help reduce inflammation, but medical experts also suggest that certain foods may help the body fight back.

Put fish on your list

Omega 3 fatty acids, which have been shown to reduce the body's inflammatory response to infections, are essential to staying healthy. But our body cannot produce enough, so we must get them from our diets. Fresh and healthful foods that are rich in these nutrients include tuna, sardines and salmon. I love salmon. In fact, when I was in Alaska, I ate so much salmon my husband swore my skin got pinker. Try to eat at least two servings a week of these Omega 3-rich foods.

Other options include canola, olive and soybean oils; however, these are high in calories, so use them in moderation.

Color your plate

To make meals more healthful and appealing, add some color to your plate. Fruits and vegetables are a great source of antioxidants, which help prevent inflammation and cell damage and support your immune system. Three major anti-oxidants are beta-carotene, vitamin C and vitamin E. You can get these vital nutrients from pineapple, papayas, berries, citrus, sweet potatoes and kale. Have you ever had kale salad? It's cool, crisp and delicious.

Research suggests that just four weekly servings of broccoli, cabbage and cauliflower can reduce the risk of disease. They also provide a great source of iron and can help reduce cholesterol.

And, don't forget about dark chocolate, which is filled with deliciously healthy antioxidants. Try chocolate with 70 percent or more cocoa. Two tablespoons of dark chocolate chips with fresh berries as a snack or dessert is a treat that can not only satisfy your craving for "a little something sweet," but promote healthier joints, too.

Spice things up

There's a wonderful anti-inflammatory pantry of spices that includes ginger, garlic,

oregano, turmeric, rosemary and mint. These can help provide relief naturally and tastefully, and add a healthful dash of variety to everyday meals. Why not think outside the salt and pepper shakers and give them a try?

Many people think that vitamin supplements are all that they need, but that's not always the case. Experts agree it's best to get the vitamins and nutrients that your body needs from the foods that you eat. Talk to your doctor and nutritionist to find out what's right for you.

Karen Kansler is an arthritis outreach nurse at MedStar Good Samaritan Hospital. She can be reached at Karen.Kansler@MedStar.net.

Karen's Top 10

Enjoy these healthful foods in moderation to help ward off illness:

- Salmon
- Canola and Olive Oil
- Berries (any type)
- Pineapple
- Broccoli
- Soybeans
- Oatmeal
- Brown Rice
- Beans
- Spinach

March 21, 2013 CatholicReview.org