HOLISTIQUE MEDICAL CENTER · BELLEVUE, WA

ARTHRITIS AND THE ROLE OF OUR GUT HEALTH

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PREVALENCE OF ARTHRITIS?

Arthritis is one of the most widespread health conditions in the United States that impacts more than 54 million Americans, making it the number one cause of disability in the country according to the CDC. That means over 1 in every 5 adults is affected by this debilitating condition.

With the aging of the US population, the prevalence of an arthritis diagnosis is expected to increase in the coming decades. By the year 2040, an estimated 78.4 million adults aged 18 years and older will have such a diagnosis. With such a significant projected rise, addressing root cause issues are all the more crucial.

WHAT IS ARTHRITIS?

Arthritis means inflammation or swelling of one or more joints. It describes more than 100 conditions that affect the joints, tissues around the joint, and other connective tissues. Specific symptoms vary depending on the type of arthritis but usually include joint pain and stiffness. Arthritis prevalence increases with age and is significantly more prevalent in women for multiple reasons including the role of hormones. Though it shows up in the joints, it is far more than just a joint disease.

ROOT CAUSE OF ARTHRITIS?

Over the years, the medical community has come to a consensus that prolonged inflammation fuels the development of a wide range of chronic diseases, including arthritis.

To treat arthritis effectively, the focus should not be limited to specific areas where symptoms present in a patient’s body. When searching for the underlying causes of inflammation, an imbalance in the microflora is often a recurring theme in many patients suffering from this disease.

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A healthy gastrointestinal (GI) tract plays a critical role in overall health and houses the largest number of immune cells in the body. A faulty immune system is responsible for the most common types of inflammatory arthritis including rheumatoid arthritis, gout, psoriatic arthritis, spondylarthrosis, and juvenile idiopathic arthritis.

ROLE GUT HEALTH PLAYS?

Gut health has to do with the way that microbes interact with the immune system, and there are trillions of microbes that live in (and on) our bodies. The ones in the GI tract help digest food, make important vitamins, and more. They also help teach our immune system the difference between harmless bacteria and ones that can make us sick. Microbiome researchers have documented significant associations between intestinal microbiome changes and many different types of arthritis.

Certain microbes activate immune T cells that promote or suppress inflammation. In a healthy microbiome, this means the immune system does what it's supposed to: Pathogens are destroyed, and harmless cells are free to go about their business. But things go awry when there are too many pro-inflammatory T cells or not enough anti-inflammatory ones to rein them in. That's why researchers think a problem with the microbiome might play a major role in inflammatory types of arthritis, where the body attacks healthy tissue instead of invading organisms.

HOW TO IMPROVE GUT HEALTH?

Many factors, especially antibiotics, smoking, stress, and certain foods, can disrupt the microbiome. This, in turn, can trigger an abnormal immune response and unchecked inflammation in the gut.

There are several ways to optimize gut health. Diet plays a critical role. A varied, plant-based diet that includes prebiotic and probiotic foods, using high-quality fats and oils, and eating organic pasture-raised meats is a great start while avoiding sugar/food dyes/preservatives and minimizing simple carbohydrates.

Many other healthy lifestyle habits that are good for arthritis are also beneficial for your gut. These include exercises such as brisk walking, good sleep habits, stress management, and smoking cessation.

Implementing these steps are proven measures that have shown to improve arthritis pain, fatigue, function, and most importantly *quality of life*.

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