

# The importance of a healthy diet



Maintaining a healthy diet is an important part of protecting your overall health, managing weight, improving your energy levels and boosting your immune system.<sup>1</sup> Although no diet has been proven to treat the symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis (RA), complementing your treatment with the right diet can help you feel better overall, and some foods may assist in lessening symptoms and flare ups.<sup>1,2</sup>

**Before starting a new diet, you should consult your doctor to make sure you are making the right choices to support your health.<sup>1</sup>**

A healthy diet should include a variety of choices from each of the five food groups:<sup>1,3</sup>

- Vegetables
- Fruit
- Grain (cereal) foods
- Lean meats/eggs/nuts/legumes
- Milk/cheese or an alternative

## Weight loss

If you are overweight and living with RA, it can put extra strain on your joints. Losing some weight will reduce the stress on your joints, which can lessen your pain and make you more mobile.<sup>2</sup> Here's an example of what a weight loss friendly meal could look like:<sup>4,5</sup>



## Reducing inflammation

Although there is not a solid link between diet and RA, some studies have shown that the type of inflammation experienced in RA can be affected by certain foods. The Omega 3 oils found in fish like salmon, mackerel and sardines may be helpful in reducing the inflammation linked to RA, and may also help to lower your risk of heart disease.<sup>6</sup> Dietary guidelines recommend eating two portions of oily fish each week.<sup>6,7</sup> It's also a good idea to look at the amount and type of fat in your diet – try and reduce the amount of saturated fat consumed and replace with unsaturated fats, like olive oil. In one study, a Mediterranean-style diet (which includes fish, pulses, nuts, olive oil and plenty of fruit and vegetables) was shown to improve physical function and vitality.<sup>8</sup>

Here's an example of what a meal high in anti-inflammatory foods could look like:<sup>4,9</sup>

**Brown rice**<sup>9</sup> - A wholegrain food which provides high amounts of antioxidants and vitamin E which may reduce inflammation.

**Salmon**<sup>9</sup> – High in omega-3 fatty acids which have shown their potential as being anti-inflammatory.



## The importance of getting essential nutrients

Vitamins and minerals are called essential nutrients because our bodies need them to perform important functions which keep us healthy. Most people get all the vitamins and minerals they need by eating a balanced diet that includes a variety of foods across the five food groups, and do not need to take a supplement. While there are vitamin and mineral supplements that may help some people with RA, it's important to talk to your doctor before you start taking any new medication, including vitamin or mineral supplements.<sup>10</sup>

## Staying hydrated

Water is an essential part of a healthy balanced diet, so it's important to stay hydrated. Your body needs water to flush waste products out of your body, which can help fight inflammation, and being hydrated helps to keep your joints well lubricated. Drinking enough water may also help you eat less, which can help if you're trying to lose weight. It is recommended that adults drink about 8 to 10 cups of fluid each day. You can get water from drinks like coffee or tea, but it's a good idea to choose water, particularly over drinks that contain added sugars or alcohol.<sup>11,12</sup>

## General tips for maintaining a healthy RA diet

The most important way to stay healthy and manage your diet when you have RA is to do your best at eating more of the good foods (fruits, vegetables, fish) and limiting more processed foods.<sup>1,13</sup>

- Eat plenty of vegetables (at least 5 serves each day)
- Eat 2 serves of fruit each day
- Include whole grains, beans, and lentils
- Avoid processed foods or foods with chemicals and preservatives
- Minimise your consumption of refined sugars
- Minimise your consumption of alcohol
- Enjoy a healthy variety of foods
- Choose appropriate amounts of nutritious food and drinks to meet your energy needs and balance your diet with regular and moderate exercise
- Stay well hydrated

## More information

If you're looking for more advice about the amounts and kind of foods to eat for health and wellbeing, you can find a lot of useful information at <https://www.health.govt.nz/your-health/healthy-living/food-activity-and-sleep/healthy-eating>.

Some people with RA find it helpful to talk to a dietitian, who can give you individual advice and help you plan a diet that best suits you and your health needs. You can find an accredited practicing dietitian near you at <https://dietitians.org.nz>.

---

**References:** **1.** Rheumatoid Arthritis Support Network. RA Diet: What foods to eat if you have rheumatoid arthritis. Available at: <https://www.rheumatoidarthritis.org/living-with-ra/diet/> [Accessed March 2022]. **2.** Arthritis Australia. Healthy eating. Available at: <https://arthritisaustralia.com.au/managing-arthritis/living-with-arthritis/healthy-eating/> [Accessed March 2022]. **3.** Eat for health. Australian dietary guidelines. Available at: [https://eatforhealth.govcms.gov.au/sites/default/files/content/n55\\_australian\\_dietary\\_guidelines.pdf](https://eatforhealth.govcms.gov.au/sites/default/files/content/n55_australian_dietary_guidelines.pdf) [Accessed March 2022]. **4.** Australian Healthy Food Guide. The Perfect Plate. Available at: <https://www.healthyfoodguide.com.au/resources/the-perfect-plate> [Accessed March 2022]. **5.** Healthline. The 20 most weight-loss-friendly foods on the planet. Available at: <https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/20-most-weight-loss-friendly-foods> [Accessed March 2022]. **6.** The association of UK dieticians. Rheumatoid arthritis and diet: food fact sheet. Available at: <https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/rheumatoid-arthritis-diet.html> [Accessed March 2022]. **7.** Better Health Channel. Fish. Available at: <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/fish> [Accessed March 2022]. **8.** Sköldstam L et al. Ann Rheum Dis 2003;62(3):208–14. **9.** Khanna S et al. Front Nutr 2017;4:52. **10.** Healthdirect. Vitamins and minerals. Available at: <https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/vitamins-and-minerals> [Accessed March 2022]. **11.** Arthritis Foundation. Best Drinks for Arthritis. Available at: <https://www.arthritis.org/health-wellness/healthy-living/nutrition/healthy-eating/best-drinks-for-arthritis> [Accessed May 2022]. **12.** Healthdirect. Drinking water and your health. Available at: <https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/drinking-water-and-your-health> [Accessed March 2022]. **13.** Eat for health. Recommended number of serves for adults. Available at: <https://www.eatforhealth.gov.au/food-essentials/how-much-do-we-need-each-day/recommended-number-serves-adults> [Accessed March 2022].

AbbVie® is a registered trademark of AbbVie Inc. AbbVie Ltd, L6, 156-158 Victoria Street, Wellington 6011.  
Medical information phone: 0800 900 030. [www.abbvie.co.nz](http://www.abbvie.co.nz).  
NZ-RNQR-220006 TAPS BG2000 Prepared March 2022.