



**MICHIGAN STATE  
UNIVERSITY**

**Extension**

# Senior Health Line

January 2017



## **Understanding Rheumatoid Arthritis (R.A.)**

Rheumatoid arthritis is an autoimmune disease which causes chronic inflammation in joints. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, rheumatoid arthritis affects about 1.5 million adults in the United States. An auto immune disease is a condition that occurs when your body's immune system attacks healthy tissue by mistake. It can lead to damage of tissues in the body including the skin, eyes, lungs, heart and blood vessels. Rheumatoid arthritis is not the same as osteoarthritis. R.A. can become so severe that the bone is destroyed and the joints become deformed. Osteoarthritis is damage to the joints from use and wear and tear.

Rheumatoid arthritis occurs when one's immune system attacks the lining of the membranes that surround joints. This leads to pain and swelling that thickens the lining of the joint, and destruction of the cartilage and bone in the joint. In addition, it causes the tendons and ligaments that hold the joint together to stretch and become weak which may lead to the joint losing its shape.

Doctors really have not understood why this process begins. There seems to be a genetic susceptibility where certain people can be more likely to develop rheumatoid arthritis. There is now research that may have found a link between a specific germ associated with gum disease and rheumatoid arthritis. For over 100 years, scientists have noticed that people suffering from rheumatoid arthritis have a higher incidence of gum disease than others

and researchers began to look for a common denominator. They were not sure if it was because people with rheumatoid arthritis had difficulty brushing their teeth because of joint pain in their hands causing gum disease or whether there was another factor involved. Recently, in a study done jointly between researchers at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, the University of Texas Southwestern Medical School, and published in the Journal of Science Translational Medicine, a bacteria called *A. actinomycetemcomitans* was linked to both people with rheumatoid arthritis and gum disease. Signs of infection with this bacteria were seen in almost one half of the people with rheumatoid arthritis while only 11 percent of the people without rheumatoid arthritis or gum disease. The findings raised the possibility that this bacteria may cause both gum disease and rheumatoid arthritis and may be helpful in the treatment and prevention of rheumatoid arthritis.

For more information on rheumatoid arthritis, go to the arthritis foundation on line at <http://www.arthritis.org>.

## **Clear Out the Scents**

Scented products such as air fresheners, soaps, candles, and perfumes lead to health issues in more than one third of adults in the United States. These ill effects include headaches, nausea, dizziness and breathing problems. Even those products labeled "green" or "organic" can emit a range of hazardous substances that can make people ill from inhaling the scent.

In a study done at the University of Melbourne in Australia, a group of researchers surveyed over 1,100 American adults. The survey questioned them on the use and exposure of fragranced products and health effects associated with these products. The survey also asked questions about their preferences for fragrance free environments and policies. Almost 35% of those responding to the survey reported ill effects when exposed to fragranced products. The most common health related effects were respiratory problems, migraine headaches, sinus issues (congestion or sneezing), rashes and other skin problems, and difficulty thinking, concentrating or remembering. 15% said they had to miss work due to exposure to fragranced products at some time and over half responded that they would like to see fragrance free workplaces, health care facilities, hotels and airplanes.

According to Dr. David Huston who is chairman of allergy and immunology and professor of medicine and microbial pathogenesis at Methodist Hospital in Houston, Texas, there is a difference between an allergic reaction and an irritant reaction. Approximately 10% of Americans suffer from allergies that can have detrimental effects from inhaled irritants, while others who suffer from an irritant reaction have symptoms that are real but have no lasting effects after being removed from the location causing the reaction.

United States law does not require the disclosure of ingredients in fragranced products. Dr. Huston believes that it may be time to change U.S. laws to disclose all ingredients contained in fragranced consumer products to help consumers avoid products that cause even temporary health symptoms.

### Healthier Snacking Tips

It's a new year and time to make small step toward being healthier. Here are some tips for healthier snacking:

\*Snack on fresh fruits and vegetables. The fiber will help make you feel. Full of vitamins and minerals as well.

\*Try whole grains instead of refined grains. They offer more vitamins and fiber.

\*Be aware of portion size. Do not eat right out of a bag or box. Measure your snack so as not to over indulge.

\*Read labels. This will give you information on portion size and calorie counts.

\*Be sure to only be snacking when you are hungry and not for reasons such as boredom or stress. No vegging out in front of the television snacking on things less healthy than veggies.

### Easy Mushroom Barley Soup

1 Tablespoon olive oil

1 onion, chopped

2 stalks celery, sliced

2 carrots, peeled and chopped

2 cups mushrooms, sliced

½ cup quick cooking barley

1 teaspoon garlic powder

½ teaspoon ground thyme

3 cups low sodium chicken broth

1 ½ cups water

1 Tablespoon fresh chopped parsley

Heat oil in a large soup pot over high heat. Sauté onions, celery, carrots and mushrooms for about 4 minutes or until mushrooms begin to brown and the onions become translucent. Add the rest of the ingredients except the parsley and bring to a boil. Lower the heat to a simmer and cook for about 15 minutes and the barley is tender.

Divide into 4 soup bowls. Garnish with the parsley and serve hot.

Nutrition per serving:

Calories 170; Fat 4 g; Protein 8 g;

Carbohydrates 26 g; Fiber 6 g; Sodium 100 mg

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