

BE WELL

## Arthritis Relief: A Joint Effort

By Debbie DeAngelo  
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Nothing can crimp your style quite like osteoarthritis. Few of us make it through our middle age or senior years escaping at least some degree of it. In fact, it's the leading cause of disability in this age group.

Commonly referred to as “wear and tear” arthritis, it's a disease of the entire joint. This includes the bone, cartilage, ligaments and lining of the joint. Repetitively used and weightbearing joints, such as fingers, knees, hips, and the spine, are primary targets. Hallmark symptoms are pain, stiffness, swelling and

cracking noise with movement. The aim of standard treatment is to improve function and reduce pain. These recommendations include exercise, over-the-counter and prescriptive pain relievers, and joint injections.

### **Traditional Remedies**

Beyond conventional treatment, there are a host of other modalities that may ease the symptoms of osteoarthritis. A few herbal products and acupuncture are two with a solid track record. When it comes to dietary supplementation, check with your pharmacist to ensure there are no known interactions with your medication. Here are three of the most popular options to consider for joint health.

**Boswellia.** This gum resin of the Indian Frankincense tree contains boswellic acid and terpenes, which exert an anti-inflammatory effect. A handful of clinical trials exist demonstrating its ability to improve joint functioning and diminish pain. A 2020 meta-analysis of seven clinical trials involving 545 patients unveiled Boswellia as a safe and effective treatment option for arthritis. As with many herbs, it may take several weeks to work. A typical daily dose is 100 mg.-250 mg. Look for a capsule containing 60% boswellic acid. Since black pepper and fat enhance absorption, either take it with a meal containing both or buy a supplement that includes piperine (black pepper). Boswellia may increase the side-effects of other medications, so utilize the expertise of your pharmacist prior to using it.

**Curcumin.** The active compound in turmeric, curcumin supports joint comfort and flexibility by tamping down inflammation. Research has habitually shown curcumin to be an effective option for osteoarthritis sufferers. Although many of these studies are small, the results are consistent. For example, a 2019 controlled clinical study of 139 patients with knee osteoarthritis revealed similar improvements in severity of pain when compared to a prescriptive anti-inflammatory medicine, with fewer reported side-effects. Curcumin is poorly absorbed in the body, so just like Boswellia, it should be purchased or consumed with black pepper and some fat. The extract should be standardized to 95% curcuminoids and the typical dosage range is 500 mg.-2,000 mg. daily. Keep in mind that although curcumin is generally well-tolerated, it can cause indigestion and high doses may function as a blood thinner. Once again, speak with your pharmacist.

**Acupuncture.** The first question I usually get regarding acupuncture is, “Does it hurt?” Personally, I’ve never found it to be painful. Occasionally one of the hair-thin needles that superficially penetrates the skin may sting for a few seconds, but the placement can be adjusted.

How does acupuncture work? It depends on who you ask. While conventional, Western medicine doesn't recognize the Eastern theory of balancing energy flow throughout the body, research does indicate that well-placed needles trigger a cascade of physiological changes that center on the release of our endogenous painkillers, endorphins and enkephalins. Anecdotal, as well as scientific information shows that one of the most common reasons that people seek out this 2,000-year-old technique is for pain management. More investigation is needed on arthritis specifically because study results have been mixed, yet hopeful. A 2008 meta-analysis of 10 randomized, controlled trials representing 1,456 participants disclosed that acupuncture was an effective treatment for the pain and dysfunction of knee osteoarthritis. My view ... give it a try and judge for yourself.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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