

Vegan Diet Improves Symptoms of RA

Study shows a vegan diet free of gluten can improve signs and symptoms of Rheumatoid Arthritis in some individuals.

A yearlong study of 66 patients with Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA) revealed improved symptoms and signs after following a vegan diet free of gluten, as compared to a well-balanced, non-vegan diet. The vegan diet, also known as a total vegetarian diet, includes all plant-based foods and excludes foods of animal origin. While many patients with RA report altering their diets to try to reduce unfavorable symptoms, very few studies have looked carefully at how these changes affect this joint disease. Turning to a vegetarian diet is popular with RA patients.

The purpose of the study was to carefully investigate whether a defined vegan diet could improve signs and symptoms of RA. The researchers also evaluated whether the diet affected further joint degeneration.

Researchers followed 66 individuals for one year. 38 participants were assigned to the vegan diet and 28 to the non-vegan diet. At the study's end, 22 individuals in the vegan group and 25 in the non-vegan group had completed at least 9 months of the diets.

Only 4% of the participants following the non-vegan diet responded favorably, according to specific criteria, with an improvement in signs and symptoms. Conversely, in the vegan group, *nearly 41% responded favorably*. No differences were seen between the two groups regarding further joint problems.

The researchers conclude that while the vegan diet does not protect against joint destruction, it may have real positive effects in improving signs and symptoms of RA. This study lends support to potential benefits of the total vegetarian diet in some patients with RA.

Reference:

Hafstrom, I, Ringertz, B, Spangberg, A, von Zweigbergk, L, Brannemark, S, Nylander, I, Ronnelid, J, Lasonen, Klareskog, L. (2001). A Vegan Diet Free of Gluten Improves the Signs and Symptoms of Rheumatoid Arthritis: The Effects on Arthritis Correlate with a Reduction in Antibodies to Food Antigens. *Rheumatology*, 40: 1175-1179.