



The List That Every Senior Living Care Giver Should Have

By Susan Saldibar

You have a mom in an assisted living or memory care community. She has arthritis, with chronically aching joints. She has good days and bad days. You read an article or two about nutrition and foods that help reduce inflammation and foods that aggravate inflammation. You assume that the community your mom lives in a) has all that information and b) is consistently infusing your mom's healthy diet with the right foods.

Now, flip over to the community side. How would you respond to a family member who read such an article? Do you have your own lists readily on hand to assure the family that you are doing everything possible to keep mom moving and on her feet for as long as possible?

Foods can help and foods can hurt. Do your caregivers know the difference?

The truth, according to Shane Malecha, Clinical Specialist with [Aegis Therapies](#), a Senior Housing Forum partner, is that, while everyone wants to do the right thing, there are still plenty of sedentary seniors who won't stand for fear of falling and won't move for fear of disturbing their aching, inflamed joints. That lack of activity, as we know, that can lead to more serious health issues which, in turn, can lead to hospital readmissions and even a lawsuit if negligence is suspected.

"Most caregivers and nutritionists are aware that certain foods and vitamin supplements can help aging muscles and joints," says Shane. "What happens is that, between visiting relatives and special dinners and events, it's easy for even those on special diets to get off track."

Here's the point that Shane wants senior living communities to understand. Foods really can help. And they really can hurt. Aegis works with communities to help ensure they are using foods as part of their nutritional plan for residents struggling with arthritis and other discomforts associated with joint inflammation.

Here are the lists Aegis recommends you have on hand and use consistently:

6 Best Foods for Arthritis:

1. **Fuel up on Fish:** Because certain types of fish are packed with inflammation-fighting omega-3 fatty acids, experts recommend at least 3 to 4 ounces of fish, twice a week. Omega-3-rich fish include salmon, tuna, mackerel and herring.
Great for: rheumatoid arthritis
2. **Step Up to Soy:** For those residents who are not fish-eaters. Heart-healthy soybeans (tofu or edamame) are also low in fat, high in protein and fiber and an all-around good-for-you food.
Great for: rheumatoid arthritis
3. **Opt for Oils:** Extra virgin olive oil is loaded with heart-healthy fats, as well as oleocanthal, which has properties similar to non-steroidal, anti-inflammatory drugs. But it's not the only oil with health benefits. Avocado and safflower oils have shown cholesterol-lowering properties, while walnut oil has 10 times the omega-3s that olive oil has.
Great for: rheumatoid arthritis, osteoarthritis

4. **Bet on Broccoli:** Rich in vitamins K and C, broccoli also contains a compound called sulforaphane, which researchers have found could help prevent or slow the progression of osteoarthritis (OA). Broccoli is also rich in calcium, which is known for its bone-building benefits.
Great for: osteoarthritis
5. **Go Green (Tea):** Green tea is packed with polyphenols, antioxidants believed to reduce inflammation and slow cartilage destruction. Studies also show that another antioxidant in green tea called epigallocatechin-3-gallate (EGCG) blocks the production of molecules that cause joint damage in people with rheumatoid arthritis (RA).
Great for: osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis
6. **Nosh on Nuts:** Nuts are rich in protein, calcium, magnesium, zinc, vitamin E and immune-boosting alpha linolenic acid (ALA), as well as filling protein and fiber. They are heart-healthy and beneficial for weight loss. Try offering your residents walnuts, pine nuts, pistachios and almonds.
Great for: osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis

6 Worst Foods that Can Cause Inflammation:

1. **Sugar:** It may be hard for residents to resist desserts, pastries, chocolate bars, sodas, even fruit juices. However, the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* warns that processed sugars trigger the release of inflammatory messengers called cytokines. Sugar goes by many names, so look out for any word ending in “ose,” e.g. fructose or sucrose on ingredient labels.
2. **Saturated Fats:** Several studies have shown that saturated fats trigger adipose (fat tissue) inflammation, which is not only an indicator for heart disease but it also worsens arthritis inflammation. Pizza and cheese are the biggest sources of saturated fats in the average American diet, according to the National Cancer Institute. Other culprits include meat products (especially red meat), full-fat dairy products, pasta dishes and grain-based desserts.
3. **Refined Carbohydrates:** White flour products (breads, rolls, crackers) white rice, white potatoes (instant mashed potatoes, or french fries) and many cereals are refined carbohydrates. According to *Scientific American*, processed carbohydrates may trump fats as the main driver of escalating rates of obesity and other chronic conditions. These high-glycemic index foods fuel the production of advanced glycation end (AGE) products that stimulate inflammation.
4. **MSG:** Mono-sodium glutamate (MSG) is a flavor-enhancing food additive most commonly found in prepared Asian food and soy sauce, but it can also be added to fast foods, prepared soups and soup mixes, salad dressings and deli meats. This chemical can trigger two important pathways of chronic inflammation, and affect liver health.
5. **Aspartame:** Aspartame is a non-nutritive, intense artificial sweetener found in more than 4,000 products worldwide. It is a neurotoxin, which means it affects the brain. If a resident is sensitive to this chemical, his or her immune system will react to the “foreign substance” by attacking the chemical, which in return, will trigger an inflammatory response.
6. **Alcohol:** Alcohol is a burden to the liver. Excessive use weakens liver function and disrupts other multi-organ interactions and can cause inflammation. It is best eliminated or used in moderation.

Before you say “nothing new here”, ask yourself this: Are you consistently infusing the diets of your arthritic residents with foods that are known to help reduce inflammation? How often are you letting them “cheat” with foods that may aggravate their condition?

Consistently reinforcing residents’ diets with foods from the “best” list and just as consistently avoiding those from the “worst” list just might make for a healthier resident. And it just might keep that 87-year old resident moving just enough to avoid another bed sore and postpone their dependency on pain medications.

Rack up enough of these “just might” just might add up to a healthier, more mobile resident community.



This article has been brought to you by [Aegis Therapies](#) in partnership with [Senior Housing Forum](#).

