

# Muscles & Joints

Help keep your muscles and joints  
flexible and manage pain

by Alison Cullen



## How to Use Herbs Safely

This guidebook is not intended to replace medical advice. You should consult a Healthcare Professional if you have any condition which is of concern. For best results when taking herbal products, follow the guidelines below.

If the product you have has an in-pack leaflet then you should follow the instructions and advice on the leaflet and product packaging.

If the product does not come with an in-pack leaflet then you should follow the instructions and advice on the product packaging. The following general advice also applies to products with no in-pack leaflet.

- If there is any doubt as to the nature of the problem please consult your Doctor for a diagnosis.
- Do not use when pregnant or breastfeeding unless under the supervision of a Healthcare Professional.
- Do not use for children under 2 years of age unless under the supervision of a Healthcare Professional.
- Do not exceed stated doses.
- Do not use alongside medication with the same action eg. a tranquillizing herb alongside tranquillizing medication.
- Do not take more than 3 herbal products concurrently.
- Stop taking herbal products 14 days before surgery.

## Healthy Joints

A joint is the place where the ends of two bones meet. In a healthy joint these ends are separated from each other by a layer of cartilage that prevents them from rubbing together. Synovial fluid, secreted from the membrane that lines the joint, lubricates and reduces friction between the bone ends.

## Unhealthy Joints

There are a few ways in which things can go wrong in the joint. The cartilage that should buffer the ends of the joints can be worn away. This is primarily wear and tear damage, and can be caused by sporting activities, jobs demanding high levels of physical activity, or being overweight. The ends of the bones then rub painfully together, causing inflammation and pain. (Sometimes the bones go on to fuse together, causing immobility of the joint.) This type of damage is usually identified as **osteoarthritis**. The ends of the bones, the cartilage and the membrane around the joint can all be attacked by the body's immune system if it goes wrong and starts mistaking the body's own tissues as enemies. This is known as an autoimmune disease, and is identified as **rheumatoid arthritis**. As the immune system is pretty good at attacking what it thinks are bugs and germs, the joints and surrounding tissues can become severely damaged.

Arthritic-type pain can also be caused by uric acid and calcium crystals being deposited in joints, causing pain as they get in between the ends of the bones. This factor may accompany the previous arthritic conditions or may exist on its own, in which case it may be identified as **gout** or a **gouty form of arthritis**.



## Herbs for inflammatory joint pain

All of the types of arthritic and rheumatic pain outlined here involve **inflammation**, which creates heat, swelling and pain. Getting the inflammation under control will reduce pain levels and lessen the damage being done to the joint and surrounding tissues.

### Arnica

Externally applied Arnica extracts have been used traditionally to help with inflammatory pain.

- **Anti-inflammatory**
- **Joint pain**
- **Sprains & strains**
- **Bruising**

For best results with pain relief, massage the arnica preparation onto the painful joint. Arnica products should be used as directed on the product packaging or as advised by a practitioner.

Use it on unbroken skin, and try a small dab first to rule out allergy to Arnica flowers. Do not use Arnica extract if you have a known allergy to the Arnica plant.

Research has shown a gel form of Arnica extract to have **as much effect as ibuprofen gel** in a study of more than 200 people with osteoarthritic pain in the fingers.

The number of painful joints was decreased significantly, morning joint stiffness decreased, and the patients generally preferred the Arnica gel.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Widig R et al. *Rheumatol Int* 2007; 27 : 585-591



### Devil's Claw

Although a topical treatment such as Arnica is great when you need to focus on a particular area such as a joint, internal treatments that work throughout the body are helpful when pain is widespread or reaches several areas.

Devil's Claw extracts in the form of tablets and tinctures have also been traditionally used to relieve inflammatory pain and so help improve mobility of those with arthritic or rheumatic conditions.



- **Anti-inflammatory**
- **Joint pain and backache**

Devil's Claw extracts should be taken as recommended on the product packaging or as advised by a practitioner.

*Those with digestive ulcers should always consult their doctor before taking any supplements.*

### Glucosamine sulphate

Helps to maintain and renew one of the major constituents of cartilage, the layer of buffering material that should be found between the ends of the joints but can be damaged or worn away. A supplement of 1,500 mg glucosamine sulphate daily is used in cases where damage or wear and tear erosion has taken place.

### Nettles

The Romans used to beat themselves with fresh nettles to alleviate arthritic pains, but you'll be glad to know that nothing so disagreeable is necessary these days. Nettle tincture or tablets taken internally have been used traditionally to reduce the amount of uric acid in the bloodstream. Gout or a gouty type of arthritis may therefore benefit from this herb.

## Diet

You can inherit a tendency to arthritic conditions, but there are other factors that influence the development of arthritis. One of the areas most under our own control is diet. A diet rich in non-citrus fruit and vegetables that aren't from the deadly nightshade family are thought to decrease the severity of arthritic conditions.

Certain other foods may increase pain and stiffness. Avoid saturated animal fats, keeping your intake of red meat, dairy products and eggs to a minimum. Oily fish such as herring, mackerel, sardines and salmon have a positive effect on inflammation. You can take a fish oil supplement if you don't eat fish regularly.

Caffeine and alcohol intake should be kept low, and plenty of still, plain water drunk instead. Taking a tablespoon of apple cider vinegar with a teaspoon of honey in a glass of warm water first thing in the morning can help reduce acidity and is good for digestion.

Green leafy vegetables, oats, dried fruits such as figs, seeds such as pumpkin, sunflower and sesame seeds, beans such as kidney beans, and sardines are all rich in magnesium, which encourages the proper absorption of calcium. Without sufficient magnesium, calcium may be dumped as painful crystals in and around the joints. Magnesium also helps muscles to relax. People with low magnesium levels tend to feel more pain generally.



### Eat More

- Oily fish
- Green leafy vegetables
- Vegetable oils
- Whole grain products
- Oats
- Figs
- Pumpkin, sunflower and sesame seeds
- Kidney beans
- Pineapple, papaya, mango and guava

### Eat Less

- Dairy foods
- Meat
- Eggs
- Citrus fruit
- Processed foods
- White flour
- White rice
- Potatoes
- Tomatoes
- Peppers
- Aubergines
- Sugar
- Salt



## General Tips

Keep joints warm, as cold or damp weather often heralds an increase in symptoms.

Gentle exercise will stop you from seizing up, but don't try anything that puts too much pressure on joints. Swimming, gentle walking, and beginner's yoga or T'ai Chi are good options, if you take them slowly.

## Healthy Muscles

Our muscles hold us in place, squeeze blood through our heart, propel food through our digestive tract, haul our bones around, lift our ribs to let us breathe, and even allow us to raise our eyebrows. They work quite hard, even in those of us who don't do much physical exercise. When they get tired or injured it can be very detrimental to our ability to move around as we want, as well as being painful.

## Unhealthy Muscles

There are a few relatively common muscular problems that crop up. Repetitive Strain Injury occurs when work or leisure pursuits entail repeated movements that continually pressurise the same muscle or group of muscles. These can be tricky to heal if those movements are hard to avoid, e.g. wrist action in those who work on computers.

Sports injuries, e.g. sprains and strains, which are often not given enough time to heal properly by avid sportspeople.

Fibromyalgia, which involves chronic, widespread muscle pain.

## Herbs for muscle pain

Adapting posture in an attempt to alleviate muscle pain or discomfort can be problematic because it reallocates strain and causes knock-on problems in areas that are taking the brunt of the compensating posture. It is therefore important to **reduce pain** as far as possible, as soon as possible.

### Arnica

Applied topically, Arnica extracts have been used traditionally to help relieve pain.

- **Anti-inflammatory**
- **Joint pain**
- **Sprains & strains**
- **Bruising**

Used immediately on a sports injury, it can reduce the severity of the reaction. Used for chronic conditions, it can help reduce ongoing pain.

For best results with muscular pain massage the Arnica preparation onto the area affected. Arnica products should be used as directed on the

product packaging or as advised by a practitioner. Applying it before going to bed is useful, to help reduce pain and so aid sleep.

Use it on unbroken skin, and try a small dab first to rule out allergy to Arnica flowers. Do not use Arnica extract if you have a known allergy to the Arnica plant.

### Devil's Claw

This herb takes a while to build its effect, so it is best used for chronic conditions such as RSI and fibromyalgia. It can be beneficial for conditions such as fibromyalgia, where the pain is widespread and may move around, as it works all over the body.

- **Anti-inflammatory**
- **Muscular aches and pains, backache**

There are no contraindications with Devil's Claw extracts and other medications.

*Those with digestive ulcers should always consult their doctor before taking any supplements.*

### Magnesium

This mineral is a very helpful supplement for maintaining healthy muscles. It is found in healthy foods such as brazils, cashews, sesame seeds, soya, haricot and kidney beans, chickpeas, millet, oats, brown rice, figs, spinach, dark green vegetables, dried apricots, buckwheat, and bananas.

### General Tips

Allowing a sprained or strained muscle enough time to heal is an important part of regaining full health in that muscle. If work is the cause of a repeated strain, alert your employer to the problem.



## The Healthy Crèche

Children frequently bump and bruise themselves. Applied topically, Arnica is ideal for bruising, and has a pleasant smell. Arnica is helpful in dealing with minor injuries, aches and pains so long as it is clear how the injury was caused and that it is not serious. If there is any doubt as to the cause of the injury or the seriousness of its nature, medical advice should be sought.





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Printed & published by  
KennedySmith (Press) Ltd

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