

Can a salad containing different herbs replace rescue medication in osteoarthritis?

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Editorial

Joint pain from osteoarthritis, a disease, which will reach the majority of us, when getting older and also hits a lot from the younger generation involved in sports, is a well-known reason to visit the GP. Normally the doctor will recommend paracetamol, one or the other non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID), possibly paracetamol and NSAID in combination, or in more rare cases even the synthetic opioid, tramadol. However, mentioned treatments can only modify symptoms like pain to some extent and all the treatments are blamed for severe side effects on the liver and kidneys and treatment with NSAID's in addition, can even cause erosion in the stomach and interfere with anti-coagulation and cause fatal bleeding. Mentioned pain killers, beside their side effects, are like osteoarthritis a great cost to patients and to our society.

Fair to say: what do we need? We need treatments without side effects which eliminate the reason for pain and stiffness in our joints and in best cases can even protect us to some extent from osteoarthritis. What are doctors offering us? They "treat" osteoarthritis by ordering a pain-killer or two. The health system is treating only our symptoms. The reason for pain, which is worn out cartilage should be treated. In lay man words: we do not repair the roof where the rain is dropping into our home. We put up a bucket on the sealing in the area where the rain is leaking in. This bucket however, will "turn full and run over". We should of course from the very beginning repair our roof or even better protect our roof, so an eruption would never occur.

Back to our medical world. It would be an advantage if treatment of osteoarthritis, beside reducing pain and act anti-inflammatory, would include an element of protecting and restoring cartilage. If side effects from rescue medication, as described above, could be minimized and possibly replaced by mechanisms restoring and protecting joint cartilage, we have improved.

Natural remedies, who protects and support our cartilage and also work anti-inflammatory lowering pain in osteoarthritis, can be found in nature. Examples are rose hip^{1,2} and a white version of turmeric grown in Japan.³ These two plants have both in vitro and in animal models shown the capacity to improve cartilage.^{4,5} In addition, in randomized, placebo controlled, double-blinded studies in patients with osteoarthritis both plants have shown, a statistically significant reduction in pain and improvement in physical activity.¹⁻³ At the same time there have been close to a 50% reduction in the consumption of paracetamol, NSAIDs and tramadol comparing active treatment against placebo. Indeed many of the volunteers on active treatment were able to avoid over the counter or prescription painkillers after 3-6 month herbal treatment.¹⁻³

The rose hip studies were testing combined seed and shell powder from subspecies Lito, which would always contain a certain minimum amount of a galactolipid GOPO known to improve cartilage.⁴ The daily dose was 2.5-5.0 gram treated for 3-6 month.¹ In the study on

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white turmeric an extraction of the root, of a subspecies high in a certain di-terpene and nearly without any curcumin, was used. One capsule daily, always containing a minimum of the spoken di-terpene was given and treatment was maintained for 6 month³. It is striking that both treatments offered a reduction in pain and an improvement in daily activity. And in addition, the volunteers, who were told that they were allowed to reduce the consumption of rescue medication during the study period, if they wanted so, reported a statistically significant decline in their consumption of drugs like paracetamol, NSAID^s and tramadol when compared to placebo.¹⁻³ For sure plants like Ginger,⁶ Devils claw, Yellow turmeric, containing curcumin, are also highly relevant to include in this discussion and so are several other plants not stated here.

What should be brought into our minds is that the impact from the different plants, mentioned here, can be additive as the active ingredients in the plants work from different angles. Fair to say, the galactolipid GOPO from rose-hip, the di-terpene from white turmeric, the curcumin from yellow turmeric and gingeroles from Ginger – they all have different biological pathways in our organism and may work additively. So generate a mixed salad containing different anti-inflammatory and cartilage protecting roots and fruits - this would possibly do. If we in a well-designed clinical trial, testing a salad containing different fruits and or roots documented to alleviate pain in osteoarthritis and improve cartilage, can prove a lower consumption of rescue and prescription medicine, then we have reached a step forward. Such step can have an impact on governmental cost for medicine and at the same time it will improve quality of life for a tremendous amount of human's worldwide suffering from osteoarthritis. Finally: let us have a dream that one day we can eat in a way that we need less painkillers. However, we need to prove that – we need to convert our dreams in to reality by more basic and clinical research.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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