



Health & Nutrition Letter

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Are You at Risk for Arthritis?

(New checklist will help you find out)

ARTHRITIS IS THE LEADING cause of disability in the United States, affecting nearly one out of every six people. By the year 2020, as baby boomers age, it's expected to impact one in five.

Some people suffer from arthritis but haven't been diagnosed—and are therefore left untreated. Others, while arthritis-free, are at increased risk for the disease. This includes women (who develop it more often than men); people who are overweight (excess poundage puts extra pressure on the joints); and those who experienced sports injuries as young adults (and thereby weakened their reserves of joint cushioning).

Are you at risk? To find out, use the 12 question checklist on page 6, issued by the Arthritis Foundation. If you are, there's much you can do to prevent or at least slow the progression of the disease—or cope with it. Losing just a little excess weight, exercising regularly, and modifying the way you do certain activities (such as bending to carry heavy loads) can go a long way. Even practicing good posture can help protect your joints.

For more information, contact the Arthritis Foundation all through May (National Arthritis Month) at (800) 283-7800 or www.arthritis.org.

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High-Protein Diets: When Lost Pounds Come Back to Haunt You

IF THE HIGH-PROTEIN, low-carbohydrate Atkins diet really worked over the long term, you'd think that its followers would be well represented in a large group of successful dieters. But that's not the case.

Researchers from the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, and Brown University looked at data from the National Weight Control Registry, a group of some 3,000 people who have lost a minimum of 30 pounds—and kept that weight off for over a year. The registry, established in 1995, accepts any dieter who meets these criteria, no matter how he or she shed the pounds.

The researchers calculated the amounts of carbohydrate, protein, and fat in the diets of some 2,700 registry members and compared them to guidelines for the Atkins diet, which strictly limits the carbohydrate a dieter can consume. Only 8 percent of the registry members were in line with the diet's most liberal carbohydrate allowance of 90 grams a day. (Eat a

banana, a baked potato, and a cup of skim milk and you've hit the limit.) No doubt even fewer successful dieters were subsisting on Dr. Atkins's most stringent carbohydrate limit of 25 grams a day. Instead, most of them were eating a high-carbohydrate diet, which translates into about 225 grams for a 1,500-calorie plan.

Study leader Holly Wyatt, MD, says that she was surprised to see so few Atkins dieters represented in the registry, given the diet's popularity. "It makes me wonder if the diet works over the short term but is potentially a hard behavior to continue one, two, or three years down the road," she comments. Indeed, on a diet where even grapefruit is an indulgence, it's no wonder so few people seem to stick with it.

High-Protein Smoke and Mirrors

Low-carbohydrate, high-protein proponents claim that their plans work by nudging dieters' metabolisms into an altered state called ketosis, in which the body begins to burn fat instead of carbohydrate for fuel. But when a group of investigators from New York racked the food intake of overweight people who followed the Atkins plan "by the book" for 4 weeks, the dieters slashed an average of 1,000 calories per day—enough to make *anyone* on *any* calorie-lowering diet drop a few pounds.

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Getting a Handle On a Drinking Problem

A new book shows how

UNLIKE THE stereotypical image of the excessive drinker as a bum on a bench with paper bag in hand, "most people with serious drinking problems have jobs, families, and places to live," says *Sober for Good: New Solutions for Drinking Problems—Advice from Those Who Have Succeeded* (Houghton Mifflin Company: Boston, 2001). But "the sad truth," the book explains, "is that few people seek help for their drinking problems....of the almost 14 million Americans estimated to have serious problems with alcohol, it is believed that only one in ten receives any form of treatment."

One reason, the book posits, is that many people believe Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) is the only recovery route available, and they are not always enamored of its tenets. "I never bought into that AA powerless thing," says Jackie D, one of the 222 "masters" in the book who has remained sober for 10 years. Others don't buy into the third of AA's 12 steps, which involves giving yourself over to a higher power. And some don't accept the group's

philosophy that you're in recovery for life.

Not that many people don't lick an alcohol problem with AA. Book author Anne M. Fletcher, MS, RD, the former executive editor of this newsletter, points out that of the 222 masters she interviewed, almost 100 stopped drinking with the help of that organization. But others went to much less well known groups, including Women for Sobriety (WFS), designed to bolster members' sense of self-value rather than humble them; SMART Recovery (Self Management and Recovery Training Recovery), which helps people learn both the physical and emotional triggers that lead them to drink; and Secular Organizations for Sobriety (SOS), which makes not drinking a priority over all else, even in the despair of, say, a divorce or loved one's death. Some also went to residential treatment programs, while others quit drinking solo, and still others used a *variety* of approaches.

The point, Ms. Fletcher says, is that there are many types of help, so people considering tackling a drinking problem have myriad

avenues for solutions at their disposal. A terrific nuts-and-bolts section, "A Consumer Guide to Recovery Options," encapsulates the approach of each with addresses, phone numbers, and websites along with lots of books on alcohol recovery recommended by the masters. But don't skip the rest of the book; **the stories of everyone from doctors and lawyers to homemakers and others who have conquered drinking problems will inspire you. (Many attempted to stop drinking three to five times before they were successful, learning from each failed attempt.)** There's even a chapter for loved ones of those with alcohol problems, with ways for them to cope—and help the problem drinker recover.

What led Ms. Fletcher to write *Sober for Good*? She wished something like this had been available when she got on top of her own drinking problem 17 years ago.

***** *Highly recommended*

Books are rated on a scale of 1 star (poor) to 5 (excellent).

Take Control: Assess Your Joint Health* *Continued from page 1*

1. Are you 45 years of age or older? **Yes No**
2. Have you ever had an injury to your knee severe enough to put you in bed; to force you to use a cane, crutch, or brace; or to require surgery? **Yes No**
3. Are you more than 10 pounds overweight? **Yes No**
4. Have you in the past, or do you currently, participate in more than 3 hours per day of heavy physical activities, such as bending, lifting, or carrying items on a regular basis? **Yes No**
5. Do you have hip problems that caused you to limp as a child? **Yes No**
6. Has a doctor ever told you that you have arthritis? **Yes No**
7. During the past 12 months, have you had pain, aching, stiffness, or swelling in or around a joint? **Yes No**
8. In a typical month, were these symptoms present daily for at least half of the days in that month? **Yes No**
9. Do you have pain in your knee or hip when climbing stairs or walking 2 to 3 blocks (1/4 mile) on flat ground? **Yes No**
10. Do you have daily pain or stiffness in your hand joints? **Yes No**
11. Are you now limited in any way in any activities because of joint symptoms (pain, aching, stiffness, loss of motion)? **Yes No**
12. Because of joint symptoms, rate your ability to do the following
0—without ANY difficulty 1—with SOME difficulty 2—with MUCH difficulty 3—UNABLE to do
a) Dress yourself, including shoelaces and buttons? 0 1 2 3
b) Stand up from an armless, straight chair? 0 1 2 3
c) Get in and out of a car? 0 1 2 3
d) Open a car door? 0 1 2 3
 Please add the numbers shown next to each of your answers for question 12. $a + b + c + d =$

What's Your Score? If you answered yes to any of questions 1 to 5, you are at risk for arthritis. If you answered yes to two or more of questions 6 to 11, you might have symp-

toms of arthritis. If you scored a 6 or more on question 12, please contact your healthcare professional immediately.

* Source: Arthritis Foundation

Did you know... Mowing and raking are forms of moderate activity. Do either one five times a week for 30 minutes, and you've met recommended exercise goals.