

## YOU TELL THEM: IT'S IN THEIR HEAD

DR. JAMES SCALA, Ph.D.

# Arthritis

### JEANETTE'S STORY

"I couldn't get out of bed. I thought my knees were on fire. Nothing like the ache I would get sometimes." Jeanette talks about it like it was yesterday and not 22 years ago. "I remember the doctor saying I had rheumatoid arthritis. The first thought that went through my mind was that rheumatoid arthritis is something old people get. I was only 22."

Jeanette started with large quantities of aspirin which seemed to help, but her knees and hands continued swelling off and on, so the doctor prescribed stronger medication. The pain would subside for awhile, but if the weather changed or got cold, it would come back. Then, when Jeanette got pregnant, things began to change.

While I was pregnant, the swelling and pain disappeared. I wished I could always be pregnant, but without having lots of babies. I love children, but the arthritis seemed to get worse after I stopped nursing. It was almost like the arthritis was making up for lost time," she said, while wringing her hands. Her knuckles were large and knobby, a characteristic of rheumatoid arthritis. I could see that discussing her problem made her uncomfortable.

### WHAT IS ARTHRITIS?

Rheumatoid arthritis is an inflammatory autoimmune disease that attacks the joints, usually the knees, hips, and hands. However, some types of arthritis attack the back and neck. This disease has a definite hereditary history and usually appears in the female side of a family. Consequently, about three out of four people with rheumatoid arthritis are women.

In spite of the hereditary factor, most experts suspect a viral origin. It seems that in some people a viral infection in early life, such as a case of flu or mononucleosis, is required. It's theorized that the virus remains dormant in the membrane that surrounds the joints and holds in the fluid that lubricates them. This membrane is named the synovial membrane and the fluid is the synovial fluid.

Some form of severe stress, physical or emotional, starts the dormant virus growing. Two things happen under stress: body temperature often drops, and the immune system declines. Both changes favor the growth of dormant viruses. That's why people often catch cold or flu when they are run down, tired, or there's a family tragedy. When the virus in the joint starts growing, the body starts a defense strategy in motion. First, it causes the joint to become inflamed and the immune system sends in cells to attack the virus. Unfortunately, it's thought that these cells attack cells in the synovial membrane. To counter this attack, the synovial membrane grows more rapidly than normal. Excessive membrane growth causes the membrane to become highly convoluted. These convolutions increase the tissue in and around the joint, causing it to become distorted. Each flare-up makes the membrane grow a little more and the joint becomes a little worse, until it's permanently swollen, distorted, and not very functional. The only approach to restoring functionality is surgery, which often includes a joint replacement.

I suggest you purchase my book entitled *The Arthritis Relief Diet* in which I discuss some of the 375 arthritis cases that I studied. The book explains the types of physical and emotional stress that trigger flare-ups and the methods employed to stop them.

Arthritis in women is often dormant during pregnancy. Jeanette is a typical example. This dormancy probably results from the normal changes that occur during pregnancy that have an effect on the activity of the immune system. The remission usually lasts as long as the mother nurses her infant. Sometimes a woman will have mild arthritis and, following pregnancy, the disease will start up again with a vengeance. Sometimes the baby can go home, but the mother can't.

Like all inflammatory diseases, arthritis can go into remission, even in advanced stages, and then flare up again. A flare-up is usually traceable to some form of stress, either physical or mental. Examples of physical stress include a serious chill, a significant change in the weather, excessive fatigue, or a serious fall, to name a few. Emotional stress includes divorce, a serious argument, illness, the death of a loved one, problems with the children, and so on. If you can think of something that will disrupt a person's life, it can probably elicit an arthritis flare-up.

In recent years, experts have recognized that certain foods can cause flare-ups. Folklore has claimed this fact for generations, but it was largely ignored. In my book, I cite many examples of these antagonistic foods, that range from some plant foods to many animal foods, such as beef and dairy products. There are no firm rules on which foods are causative. Consequently, a thorough ongoing food-diary is the only way to identify these food sensitivities if you have arthritis. I emphasize that these reactions to food are sensitivities and not allergies. If you're allergic to a certain food, eating just a little bit of it will cause a response. With a sensitivity, the response is much slower and can sometimes take several days before it affects you.

Arthritis can strike at any age, even juveniles under the age of two. A minor consolation is that young children usually seem to outgrow the disease. When it strikes after puberty, it's often permanent.

There are two general types of arthritis: osteo and rheumatoid. Osteoarthritis affects the bones only and seems to be part of any animal with a skeleton. We'll all get osteoarthritis if we live long enough. In contrast, rheumatoid arthritis affects only the soft tissue and is the arthritis we are discussing here. Rheumatoid arthritis has as many as a hundred variations.

### RETURN TO JEANETTE

"My arthritis seemed to get progressively worse. Our family doctor sent me to a rheumatologist who used steroids during a flare-up. The first few days after the steroid injections I felt terrible and couldn't sleep, but once the side effects wore off, I felt good again. I used prescription analgesics daily to keep the pain and swelling down. During one particularly long flare-up, my rheumatologist suggested I try gold shots."

Gold shots are injections of a salt from the metal gold. They are usually given monthly and are moderately painful because a large needle is necessary. The side effects of gold shots can be devastating. These side effects range from a mild rash, which usually disappears in a few weeks, to death, and a number of problems in between. Only 50 percent of the people who start gold shots can continue. During the first three months of gold

shots, the patient is monitored weekly. This weekly monitoring is necessary to detect a reaction.

#### DID THEY WORK?

"At first I felt that the shots were worse than the arthritis, but the side effects subsided and I felt better. My arthritis didn't seem to flare up, but it kept progressing. At least I didn't take any more drugs," she said. "Then my life changed."

"A friend, Connie, had attended a Shaklee nutrition seminar where a woman spoke on how supplements helped her arthritis. This friend had gotten her name and suggested I speak with her. She offered to take me to see this lady," she said, and quickly continued to explain why

"By this time, I couldn't get around very well. My knees were always swollen and my hands were getting knobby. My friends could tell that I hurt a lot and they wanted to do something. I was very tired and took naps regularly. If it weren't for our two children, I know my husband would have left. I felt bad for him because he had a good job and I know I was holding him back. Our sex life was over partly because of my pain and partly because of my appearance. I had discussed these problems with Connie and she was trying to help. So, I agreed to go, as much for her as for me."

Jeanette explained why she didn't put much hope in Connie's effort. "I had read all the information on arthritis. It emphatically said that diet and nutrition had no effect on the disease. All the literature advised was to eat a well-balanced diet."

Up to this point, Jeanette maintained a wholesome diet. Neither she nor her family used supplements regularly. Like many people, she purchased supplements in the drugstore from time to time and would use them off and on. As often as not, she and her husband would use the supplement for awhile, and then they would collect dust somewhere in the kitchen or medicine cabinet. Visiting the home of an enthusiastic Shaklee user was an experience for Jeanette.

"We were greeted at Helen's door with a spirited smile. I could tell immediately from her hands that her arthritis had progressed beyond mine, but it didn't seem to slow her down. She had a gleam in her eye and seemed to be full of energy. We laughed a lot that morning. Her enthusiasm was infectious. I felt good just being with her. Connie and I sat down and she told me her story."

Helen explained how her arthritis had progressed similar to Jeanette's. It started shortly after her messy divorce was final and continued with a vengeance. She said the divorce was her husband's doing, but she thought she was being punished when she got arthritis. She had gone the same drug route as Jeanette had gone, except she wouldn't take the gold shots when her doctor proposed them. She decided to try an alternate approach. She tried several things, but the nutrition was the only one that worked. Though, she added, that meditation seemed to help a great deal.

Jeanette was shocked at the suggestion of taking 35 alfalfa tablets. Instant Protein in juice was all right, and she could handle taking more supplements than she knew existed, but alfalfa was animal food and 35 tablets of anything seemed excessive. In her own words, she decided to try, for a simple reason. "I decided that if I could have half of Helen's energy and outlook, I'd be willing to take twice as much alfalfa." She

quickly added, "I didn't care if my hair turned green from the alfalfa, and I had to stick with the gold shots."

Jeanette will be the first to explain that it wasn't easy to take all the supplements. She gagged on the alfalfa, tasted fish from the EPA, and felt bloated to the point of bursting from the protein. Let her tell you what happened.

"One morning, after about ten days of this, I realized it was 10:00 o'clock. I had been up since 7:00 A.M. and didn't even give a thought to a nap. In fact, I planned to go shopping and hadn't even realized how good I felt. I wanted to tell everyone, but decided to tell my doctor."

Jeanette's doctor was skeptical about nutrition, but he couldn't ignore her enthusiasm and the fact that she looked better than he could ever remember. Consequently, they agreed to work together to overcome her problem. In a period of six months, she got herself off the gold shots and settled on a prescription, non-steroid, anti-inflammatory drug. She used this drug whenever she felt pain or inflammation. "After all," she said, "I can avoid lots of things, but not the weather or my kids."

Now, years later, she still uses the supplements regularly. In her own words, "I haven't felt this good since my first child. Our personal life is active again. With our children close to grown, we do more things together, and my husband wants to do them too. We also got our sex back. His interest is the best indicator of my health!"

Jeanette was one of the women who followed the plan I developed in *The Arthritis Relief Diet*, even though she had been on the supplements before I wrote the book. By taking a total dietary approach, she improved even more. From her food diary, Jeanette learned that flare-ups were caused by several foods she liked, such as tomatoes, a few citrus fruits, and several types of meat, especially processed meat. She sticks with her dietary plan and uses the following supplements daily: Vita-Lea, B-complex, vitamin C, calcium-magnesium, EPA, Instant Protein, and Daily Fiber Blend. She swears by alfalfa and takes 30 to 40 tablets daily. She is quick to add: "My hair hasn't turned green, and I don't neigh like a horse!"

#### ALFALFA

##### Bill's Story

One day I received a long letter from which I quote a section: ". . . on the other hand, the alfalfa has given me considerable relief with the ordinary type arthritis aches and pain. In fact, if I take 15 alfalfa tablets per day along with vitamin C and Vita-Lea, I get complete relief from all arthritis pain within five days, and I can count on it. Then, I can gradually cut down to eight or even as few as six tablets per day and keep the pain under control unless a bad weather front comes through and the weather changes cause my arthritis to flare up. When that happens, a small amount of aspirin alleviates the pain slightly, but alfalfa relieves it completely within five days when I resume taking it."

W. R.A.Jr., M.D.

The author's letter makes a strong case for more research to be conducted, so we can understand the alfalfa experience more clearly. It's important to recognize that Bill learned about alfalfa from a patient, but then by carefully testing himself, he found what worked best for him. You might ask: "Is it in his head?" I don't think so. You see, Bill isn't just another M.D.; he's a

board-certified psychiatrist. I think he'd know whether or not it's in his head.

#### A LITTLE MORE ABOUT ARTHRITIS

In writing *The Arthritis Relief Diet*, I worked with 375 people and personally interviewed nearly 100. Only one woman I interviewed couldn't find any serious stress that preceded her first attack. However, she pointed out that now that the arthritis is established, serious stress will often cause flare-ups. This leads me to believe that environmental factors are so important and deserve special attention.

Environmental factors play an important role in all inflammatory diseases. We usually lump them all into one word: stress. In my opinion, this is an abused word. What we're probably seeing are things that cause changes in hormonal balance. These hormonal balances and other dietary factors change the relative levels of prostaglandins.

A simple way of recognizing the environmental influence on arthritis is to observe how effectively people with arthritis can predict the weather. Although the effect of weather changes on arthritis was laughed at for years, if not centuries, it was finally tested and proven at the University of Wisconsin. They had some people with arthritis live in a phytotron, a large chamber where you can adjust all aspects of weather. Lo and behold, they could accurately detect the changes.

Prostaglandins regulate inflammation. Most drugs, such as aspirin, inhibit the prostaglandin that increases inflammation. EPA increases the prostaglandins that modulate inflammation. The balance of the prostaglandins is influenced indirectly through hormones by environmental factors, including emotional and physical stress. Rheumatoid arthritis is almost non-existent in places such as Greenland, where the natural diet favors a favorable prostaglandin balance;

Recent double-blind studies proved that gold shots were no more effective than a prescription analgesic, which has far fewer side effects.

Diet has become recognized as an adjunct to treatment, especially in the early stages of arthritis. In several clinical studies conducted in the United States and England, swelling and immobility has been significantly reduced by diet. The dietary studies included heavy EPA supplementation. A paper by E. D. Harris, M.D. in the May 1990 *New England Journal of Medicine* explains this dietary reaction.

#### IS IT IN THEIR HEADS?

When many people living in diverse areas have the same experience independently, and the experience persists, you can rule out mass hysteria. You need to search for other explanations. I selected Dr. Bill's letter because he is an example of how an inquiring mind got precisely to an effective supplement level. Alfalfa worked for him. Although I don't believe people should be that precise, other doctors have proposed that alfalfa works because it contains a bioflavonoid that resembles a drug used for inflammation. They argue it works because of this resemblance.

I find this "drug" hypothesis hard to accept. In the constant search for effective drugs that the pharmaceutical companies mount, it would have been discovered, patented, and prescribed by now. After all, the elements for commercial exploitation are all there. In addition, the raw material is easily grown in huge quantities, because alfalfa grows all over the world. I favor the

idea that the effect is from the alfalfa fiber. This was first proposed to me by Dr. Hal Ashley. Alfalfa fiber is quite unique in its ability to bind bile acids and other materials eliminated through bile. We often fail to remember that the bile duct is an excretory pathway. These bile by-products, called antigens, can cause flare-ups and even worse, keep the flare-up going. So, getting the right fiber should work to reduce flare-ups. After all, alfalfa's ability to bind bile wastes has been thoroughly tested. In addition, the prodigious amounts of alfalfa used by most people are consistent with this hypotheses. In contrast, if we were observing a drug effect, small quantities of alfalfa should be effective.

Once EPA became available, we had a much stronger foundation for supplementation. Indeed, EPA has formed the basis of clinical studies on arthritis and other inflammatory diseases in the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan, and Canada. These studies have all shown that EPA has the ability to restore prostaglandin balance and reduce inflammation. However, a total dietary commitment is better than just taking supplements.

Benefits of other nutritional supplements, such as Vita-Lea and Instant protein, are obvious. The stress of a chronic illness increases nutritional need. A person with a chronic illness, like arthritis, is likely to have a poor diet. The side effects of drugs all increase nutritional need. Drugs used in arthritis treatment increase the need for several nutrients, including vitamins C, E, B-complex, and the minerals zinc and iron. So, it's not surprising that people gain more energy and feel better when using these supplements.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

James Scala was educated at Columbia (B.A.), Cornell (Ph.D.), and Harvard (Post-doctoral studies) Universities.

He has spent his career in research, research management, and teaching. His accomplishments include over fifty published papers on research in nutrition, biochemistry, and biology. His teaching includes courses for undergraduate, graduate, medical, and dental school students.

As a research manager, Dr. Scala held positions at Procter and Gamble, Owens-Illinois, Unilever, General Foods, and was the Senior Vice-President of Scientific Affairs for the Shaklee Corporation. He now devotes his energies to writing and speaking for the general public.

Dr. Scala lives with his wife Nancy in Lafayette, California. For recreation, they sail the ketch *La Scala* from its home port on San Francisco Bay.