Caring for Your Allergies to Combat RA Inflammation

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Food Allergies and RA Flares

Rheumatoid arthritis is, by definition, an inflammatory arthritis. All the symptoms- like joint pain, swelling, redness and limited range of motion are all the result of the inflammation. Therefore, anything that promotes inflammation will further aggravate the symptoms. Only in the last few decades have scientists started to link diet with inflammation. The most well-known pro-inflammatory foods are the highly processed fast foods. In addition, food allergies are also another big trigger of inflammation.

Research

A Norwegian study published in 2006 found that individuals with rheumatoid arthritis have higher levels of antibodies to proteins from milk, eggs, codfish and pork compared with people who don't have rheumatoid arthritis. The presence of antibodies in the intestines suggests that people with RA have allergies to these particular foods. This study was conducted in a laboratory setting (test tubes), and future clinical studies will be needed to confirm these findings.

The immune system produces antibodies against everything that appears to be harmful to the body. In the case of a food allergy, the immune system will recognize those foods as potentially dangerous to the body and will try to attack them by making antibodies. Furthermore, these antibodies combine with the proteins from food, generating an immune complex. These immune complexes will circulate in the body. For example, some will go to the joints and will cause flare-ups in RA patients.

In many cases, food allergies are associated with environmental allergies, hives and asthma. They also tend to run in the family. For example, someone whose parents have both been diagnosed with food allergies will be more likely to develop the same problem, compared with someone whose parents don't have food allergies.

Food Allergy Symptoms

The first symptom may be a mild itchiness in the mouth when eating that particular food. As the food moves through the digestive tract, the person may experience diarrhea, vomiting, abdominal pain or discomfort, and bloating. The allergenic food is processed in the intestines and will eventually enter the bloodstream (causing a drop in the blood pressure), and then spread throughout the body. The allergic reaction will vary greatly – from mild abdominal discomfort to severe complications (caused by anaphylactic shock for example).

The most common food allergens are peanuts (and other nuts), shellfish (like shrimps, lobsters and crabs), milk and eggs. There is also a possibility of cross reactivity. For example, someone who has an allergy to pork may be allergic to other meats as well.

What Should You Do?

If you notice flare-ups after eating certain foods, you should have a diary and keep track of those foods. See your doctor and request testing. The best way to deal with food allergies is to remove those food allergens from your diet. It would be worth eliminating gluten from your diet since recent studies suggest that many people with autoimmune conditions such as RA have gluten allergies/intolerances. Of course, stay away from highly processed foods that contain lots of fat, sugar, as well as artificial colors, flavors and preservatives; they promote inflammation in everyone, with or without food allergies. Specific drugs (i.e., antihistamines) can also be recommended by your doctor.