

Lifestyle Changes for Arthritis

Arthritis is joint pain or disease of your joints. There are more than 100 different types of arthritis and related conditions. The most common is osteoarthritis.

Osteoarthritis, also known as degenerative or “wear and tear” arthritis, is a breakdown of the cartilage that cushions your joints. When the cartilage wears down, your bones rub against each other, causing pain and stiffness. Many people have some arthritis as they age, and it tends to be more common in women. Arthritis most often affects the joints of the spine, hands, hips, knees or feet.

The good news is that you can take simple steps to protect your joints, ease your pain and help you stay active!



Caring For Yourself at Home

- Stay at a healthy weight. Being overweight puts extra strain on your joints.
- Although you may be hesitant to exercise because you think it will make your pain worse, staying active is actually a crucial part of managing osteoarthritis. The more you don't use your muscles, the more they weaken. Talk to your doctor or physical therapist about exercises that will help ease your joint pain. Some options are:
 - o Stretch. You may enjoy gentle forms of yoga to help keep your joints and muscles flexible.
 - o Walk instead of jog. Other types of exercise that are less stressful on your joints include riding a bicycle, swimming, tai chi or water exercise.
 - o Lift weights. Strong muscles help reduce stress on your joints. Stronger thigh muscles, for example, take some of the stress off your knees and hips. Learn the right way to lift weights so you do not make joint pain worse.
- Take any recommended over-the-counter or prescription medicines exactly as your doctor tells you.
- Avoid sitting in low chairs, which can make it hard to stand up.
- Put heat or cold on your sore joints as needed. Use whichever helps you most. You also can take turns with hot and cold packs.
 - o Apply heat 2 or 3 times a day for 20 to 30 minutes – using a heating pad, hot shower or hot pack – to relieve pain and stiffness.
 - o Put ice or a cold pack on your sore joint for 10 to 20 minutes at a time. Put a thin cloth between the ice and your skin.

Foods to Help Your Joints

- Many foods can also ease the pain and stiffness you may experience in your joints. We recommend a diet that is low in processed foods and saturated fats, and rich in vegetables, fish, nuts and beans. Some key foods you may want to focus on include:

- o **Fish**, which is a good source of inflammation-fighting omega-3 fatty acids. The best types include salmon, tuna, scallops, and other cold-water fish. The American Heart Association recommends at least 2 servings each week to take advantage of the beneficial anti-inflammatory properties.

- o **Nuts and seeds**, which are packed with inflammation-fighting monounsaturated fat and can help with weight loss. Nuts are also rich in protein, calcium, magnesium, zinc, vitamin E and immune-boosting alpha linolenic acid. We recommend about 1.5 ounces of nuts daily or about 1 to 2 handfuls of nuts. The best sources include walnuts, pine nuts, pistachios and almonds.

- o **Fruits and vegetables** are a great source of antioxidants, which help to neutralize molecules in the body called free radicals that can damage cells. The darker the color of the fruit or vegetable, the more antioxidants it has. Good sources include blueberries, cherries, spinach, kale and broccoli. Aim for 5 to 9 servings a day.

- o **Olive oil** is loaded with a compound called oleocanthal, which can reduce inflammation and sensitivity to pain. We recommend about 2 to 3 tablespoons of extra-virgin olive oil daily; this particular type of olive oil goes through less refining and processing, so it retains more nutrients than standard varieties.

- o **Beans** are loaded with fiber and nutrients that help reduce inflammation. They are also an



excellent and inexpensive source of protein, which is important for muscle health. The best sources include small red beans, red kidney beans and pinto beans. We recommend 1 cup, twice a week or more.

- o **Whole grains** contain fiber, which can help you feel full and maintain a healthy weight. Some studies have also shown that fiber and fiber-rich foods can help reduce inflammation. The best sources include foods made with the entire grain kernel such as whole-wheat flour, oatmeal, bulgur, brown rice and quinoa. We recommend about 6 ounces of grains per day – for example, ½ cup cooked brown rice or 1 slice of whole-wheat bread.

This information was adapted from the Arthritis Foundation; for more information, visit arthritis.org.



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