

LIVING WELL WITH ARTHRITIS

Arthritis – the inflammation of one or more of your joints – brings challenges beyond pain itself. There's the frustration over your body's new limits and an often challenging route to diagnosis. Anxiety over mounting medical bills. The difficulty of foregoing the things you love – surfing, hiking or playing catch with your kids. At times, it may be hard to simply get out of bed.

Take heart: while there is no cure for arthritis, medications and lifestyle changes can improve the quality of your life. And there are ways to prevent further damage to your joints. For starters, avoid overworking a damaged or sore joint. Try to maintain a healthy weight and drink plenty of water for joint lubrication and shock absorption. And ask your doctor about supplements for joint health, such as vitamin D, calcium and magnesium.

TREATING ARTHRITIS WITH MEDICATION

Depending on the type of arthritis (there are over 100), doctors may prescribe the following medications: analgesics, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, counterirritants, disease-modifying antirheumatic drugs, biologics and corticosteroids. When medications fail, doctors may suggest surgery, such as joint replacement or joint fusion.

LIFESTYLE AND HOME REMEDIES

In addition to medication, self-care can protect your joints and relieve arthritis pain:

- » **Exercise.** A physical therapist can help you keep your joints flexible through low-impact aerobic activity, range of motion exercises and strength training.
- » **Weight loss.** If you're obese, reducing weight can ease the stress on your joints, increase your mobility and limit joint injury.
- » **Heat and cold therapies.** Heat and cold therapies – such as heating pads, ice packs and paraffin wax – may alleviate arthritis pain.
- » **Assistive devices.** Walkers, canes and other assistive devices can help safeguard your joints.
- » **Sleep.** A good night's sleep (i.e. 8-10 hours a night) and naps can help you recoup after a flare-up and prevent them in the future.
- » **Acupuncture.** The insertion of fine needles at specific points on the skin by an acupuncturist may bring temporary pain relief for osteoarthritis.
- » **Supplements.** Ask your doctor about glucosamine, chondroitin, boswellin, betaine and curcumin.

- » **Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation.** TENS therapy stimulates nerves near an aching joint and can impede pain signal transmission to the brain.
- » **Yoga or Tai Chi.** These exercises may improve joint flexibility and range of motion.

Finally, as one man who was diagnosed with both rheumatoid arthritis and osteoarthritis wisely advises, "The best medicines you have in fighting arthritis are education, laughter and friendships. Use them well."

HELPFUL RESOURCES

- » **Arthritis Foundation:** Treatment, pain management, advocacy, resources: <http://www.arthritis.org/chapters/northern-california/>
- » **Arthritis Today:** Symptoms, treatments, daily living, fitness: <http://www.arthritistoday.org/>
- » **Arthritis Insight:** Conditions, living with arthritis, community: <http://arthritisinsight.com>

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Need help?

Call toll-free, 24 hours a day, seven days a week:

(800) XXX-XXXX

TDD: (800) 327-0801

or visit us at: members.mhn.com

company code: **XXXXX**

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