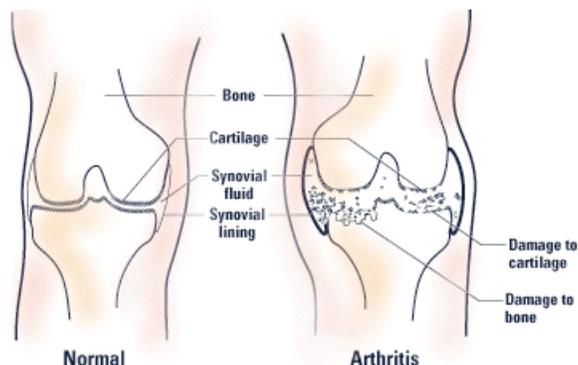


Coping with Arthritis

What is arthritis?

Arthritis is a condition that causes pain and stiffness of one or more joints. Sometimes it also causes redness or swelling.

There are different kinds of arthritis. Two common forms are osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis.



Will the arthritis get worse as I get older?

Osteoarthritis, a type of arthritis that results from the wearing down of joints, particularly tends to get worse over time. The older you get, the more worn your joints become. **Rheumatoid arthritis** causes inflammation (redness and swelling), stiffness, and deformity, especially in the joints of the hands, arms, and feet. But arthritis need not disable you. For example, being overweight puts strain on the weight-bearing joints in the spine, hips, and knees. You can protect these joints from further damage by controlling your weight. Also, muscles and joints that are not used tend to stiffen up. You can protect yourself against stiffening up by gently exercising your muscles and joints.

How much should I exercise?



You need to exercise just enough to keep your muscles strong and joints mobile. It is much better to exercise often for short periods of time and to rest in between than to exercise strenuously every once in awhile. Exercise gently without straining or jarring your joints. Wear comfortable, well-cushioned shoes, and avoid high-impact activities such as jogging on hard surfaces like concrete.

You can do some exercises sitting down; for example, tightening and then relaxing different muscles. Exercising in a warm swimming pool is good, too. The water supports your weight while you move, and the warmth helps improve joint movement.



Should I use heat or ice?

Both heating pads and ice packs can help reduce pain and stiffness in a joint. Try both and see what works best for you. You might find it helpful to put heat on your joints before gentle exercise and then to use ice afterward.



Can arthritis be cured or controlled?

So far, there is no cure for arthritis, but medication can control the pain and reduce inflammation so that you can keep moving. Many medications for arthritis, such as aspirin, acetaminophen, and ibuprofen can be bought without a prescription. Because there are different kinds of arthritis, you should talk to your doctor about which medications are best for you and the type of arthritis you have. When you take medication, make sure you do not take more than the recommended dosage.



Generally, acetaminophen is the best medication for pain relief in osteoarthritis. If this is not effective, small doses of aspirin or other anti-inflammatory medicine can be used by those who can take these medicines. Your health care provider can evaluate you and provide more guidance.

Many devices are available to help you stay independent despite arthritis. These devices include canes and walkers; bath seats and grab bars for the bathtub; and larger grips on tools, utensils, pens, and pencils. Velcro fasteners on clothes and shoes are very useful, too. Your doctor can advise you about physical therapy, occupational therapy, and special devices that may help you.

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