

JOINT HEALTH, ARTHRITIS AND IMPROVED HEALTH

Over 50 million Americans have arthritis, making it the number one cause of disability in the country. That means one in every five adults deal with joint pain each day. By modifying your daily habits, you can improve joint strength, decrease pain and improve quality of life. Still, the best way to treat a condition is to prevent it! There's no better time than today to take action.

WHAT IS ARTHRITIS?

Arthritis is inflammation of the joints which causes pain, stiffness and swelling in the joints. The exact cause of arthritis is unknown, but there are several risk factors.

- Age: The risk of developing arthritis increases with age.
- Gender: Arthritis is more common in women than men.
- Obesity: Being overweight or obese puts extra pressure on the joints.
- Work: Jobs that have repetitive movements or heavy lifting can put added stress on the joints and cause injury, which can lead to arthritis.
- Previous joint injury: Those who have injured a joint, perhaps while playing a sport, are more likely to eventually develop arthritis in that joint.
- Genetics: Certain types of arthritis run in families.



TYPES OF ARTHRITIS

There are several common types of arthritis.

1. Osteoarthritis: This type of arthritis occurs when the cartilage covering the ends of the bones gradually wears away. Without the cartilage, the bones rub against each other and the friction causes pain and swelling. Osteoarthritis typically affects the hands, knees and hips.
2. Rheumatoid arthritis (RA): This type of arthritis commonly affects the hands, wrists and knees. With RA, the body's immune system attacks the joints and causes the joint lining to swell. The inflammation spreads to surrounding tissues and can eventually damage cartilage and bone.
3. Gout: This is a painful condition caused by a buildup of uric acid. The excess uric acid forms crystals in the joints, which causes inflammation with swelling and severe pain. It commonly affects the big toe, knee and wrist joints.



TREATMENT FOR ARTHRITIS

Arthritis pain varies from person to person. Some people notice it first thing in the morning when getting out of bed, while others notice it after prolonged use of the joint. Depending on the severity of your pain, arthritis can be managed with over-the-counter pain relievers, heat and cold

therapy, supportive braces, and massage. For those who experience more intense or prolonged pain, treatment may include prescription medications, physical therapy and/or joint replacement surgery.

FOUR-WEEK FOCUS

The Four-Week Focus to better joint health is a way to progressively add in joint-friendly modifications to your daily routine to help ease and even prevent pain. Take our four-week challenge and you can start improving the health of your joints today.

Week One

If you are overweight, one of the best ways to reduce osteoarthritis pain and keep your joints healthy is by managing your weight. Being overweight increases the stress that you put on your joints. Over time, that extra body weight makes you more prone to developing arthritis and can cause rapid progression if already diagnosed. Take time this week to weigh yourself and develop a weight-loss plan that works for you.

Week Two

Get active! A body in motion stays in motion. Your joints were meant to move and adding in low-impact aerobic exercise such as walking, swimming or cycling can improve overall joint health. This week, focus on fitting in low-impact aerobic exercise. If you are new to exercise, you might want to start with ten minutes a couple of times per week and gradually build up. It is also important to include strengthening exercises since they can strengthen the muscles around the joints and protect them from excessive strain. Strong muscles contribute to better function and help to reduce bone loss related to inactivity. One set of 8 – 10 strengthening exercises performed two or three times per week for the major muscle groups of the body is recommended. As with aerobic exercise, if you are just starting out, gradually increase the number of days, exercises or repetitions for ongoing improvements in strength.

Week Three

Eat for joint health! By improving your dietary habits, you can support your body in reducing inflammation, which is one of the leading causes of joint pain. Take time this week to develop a grocery list that is high in antioxidant-rich foods like fruits and vegetables, particularly those which contain vitamins C and E. Citrus fruits, strawberries, kiwi, dark green leafy vegetables, tomatoes and broccoli are all good sources of vitamins C and E.

Week Four

Stretching benefits those with arthritis by lubricating joints and enhancing their range of motion for improved posture and function. It also reduces the risk of injuries. It is recommended that stretching exercises be done at least 3 – 5 days per week. Recreational activities such as yoga and Tai Chi incorporate stretching movements into their routines. Make time this week to stretch. If you sit for long periods of time at work, get up out of your chair frequently throughout the day and stretch. When watching TV, do some stretching exercises during the commercial breaks. Exaggerate your movements while cleaning to stretch your arms, legs and back. Always be sure to warm up before exercising by stretching.