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Arthritis 101: All About Arthritis

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Find out how to alleviate arthritis pain so you can continue to do the things you love.

Arthritis affects more than 50 million adults (<https://www.arthritis.org/about-arthritis/understanding-arthritis/what-is-arthritis.php>), but it doesn't impact everyone the same way. Even if you think you know all about arthritis, you may be surprised to learn that there are more than 100 different types. While they vary somewhat, every form of arthritis impacts the joints, causing pain and stiffness and making it harder to move around comfortably.

Arthritis can be broadly divided into two categories: degenerative and inflammatory. Osteoarthritis (OA) is the most common degenerative form, affecting nearly 27 million Americans (<https://www.arthritis.org/about-arthritis/types/osteoarthritis/what-is-osteoarthritis.php>). It's caused by a breakdown of the cartilage that normally cushions the ends of the bones, and while it usually impacts joints that get a lot of wear and tear, like knees, hips, and fingers, it can also occur in the lower back, neck, and big toes.

Inflammatory arthritis occurs when your body's immune system mistakenly attacks tissue around your joints. The most common kind is rheumatoid arthritis (RA), which affects about 1.5 million Americans (<https://www.arthritis.org/about-arthritis/types/rheumatoid-arthritis/what-is-rheumatoid-arthritis.php>).

Different types of arthritis require specific treatments, so be sure to talk to your doctor about the best options for you. In the meantime, here are a few ways to help you feel better and keep your joints healthy.

Take Over-The-Counter Pain Medication

Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) like ibuprofen and naproxen can be good options for OTC arthritis relief since they typically combat both pain and swelling. If you are unable to use NSAIDs, acetaminophen is another option for OTC pain relief. Although you don't need a prescription to get these medications, they can still have side effects. Talk to your doctor or Rite Aid Pharmacist about the safest option for you, especially if you find yourself reaching for these medications often.

Try Topical Remedies

If you want more targeted relief—maybe just your knee is bothering you—then try a cream or roll-on that includes capsaicin (<https://www.riteaid.com/shop/info/wellness-plus/programs/articles/how-to-improve-joint-health-throughout-the-day>) (the spicy part of hot peppers) or menthol (like Icy Hot (<https://www.riteaid.com/shop/icy-hot-pain-relieving-liquid-maximum-strength-2-5-fl-oz-73-ml-0353698>)). You can also try topical medications, like Aspercreme, which contains a compound that's similar to aspirin. Remember not to use topical and oral medications at the same time unless you've checked with your doctor.

Make Simple Lifestyle Changes

Being active might seem like a bad idea if it already hurts to move, but regular, gentle exercise can help keep your joints lubricated, reduce stiffness, and strengthen muscles (<https://www.riteaid.com/shop/info/wellness-plus/programs/articles/exercising-when-you-have-osteoarthritis>) to remove pressure from joints. Be sure to warm up slowly and rest when you need to. Water workouts, walking, yoga, and tai chi can all be good options for people with arthritis.

Alternating between heat and cold is a good way to keep symptoms of arthritis in check—heat generally soothes aches and can loosen stiff joints, while cold helps reduce inflammation. You can try a warm bath to improve circulation, and ice packs to help with swelling in joints.

Your diet also plays an important role in arthritis management. Fruits and vegetables are filled with antioxidants that may help fight inflammation throughout your body. Eating plenty of plant-based foods may also help you maintain a healthy weight, which can help to reduce pressure on your joints. Adding omega-3 fatty acids (<https://www.riteaid.com/shop/rite-aid-pharmacy-omega-3-6-9-lemon-flavored-softgels-120-softgels-0351111>) to your diet, particularly those found in fish like salmon, tuna, mackerel, and sardines, may help to decrease joint pain and swelling.

Invest in Helpful Tools

If you have arthritis in your hands or fingers, tools like an electric can opener (<https://www.riteaid.com/shop/proctor-silex-can-opener-1-can-opener-0364964>) can help make daily tasks more comfortable. Options like the Bed Buddy Iso-Ball (<https://www.riteaid.com/shop/bed-buddy-iso-ball-0347354>) can help strengthen finger muscles and joints while using gentle heat to soothe pain.

Follow Prescription Instructions

People with inflammatory arthritis like RA usually need prescription medication, and some severe cases of OA may require a prescription as well. Some of these medications work differently than drugs that are available over the counter. Disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARDs), for instance, don't just fight pain—they actually help slow the disease process in RA, which helps prevent further joint damage. (<https://www.riteaid.com/shop/info/wellness-plus/programs/articles/your-guide-to-managing-arthritis-symptoms>)

Arthritis is a common part of aging, but there plenty of healthy ways to address it. If you have any questions or concerns about prescriptions, lifestyle changes, or any other part of arthritis management, talk to your doctor or Rite Aid Pharmacist.

By *Barbara Brody*

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