## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COMMON FORMS OF ARTHRITIS</td>
<td>p. 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS</td>
<td>p. 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENTS</td>
<td>p. 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIVING WITH ARTHRITIS</td>
<td>p. 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARTHRITIS AND FOOD</td>
<td>p. 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARTHRITIS AND EXERCISE</td>
<td>p. 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALTERNATIVE THERAPIES</td>
<td>p. 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CARING FOR SOMEONE</td>
<td>p. 32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INFORMATION AND RESOURCES</td>
<td>p. 35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Published by
Aids for Daily Living Pty Ltd
PO BOX 799
North Ryde BC 1670
contact@aidsfordailyliving.com.au
Do You Know What Type of Arthritis You Have?

You can take heart in knowing that there are many famous and successful people, both historical and modern-day, who have struggled with some of the most common types of arthritis. Christopher Columbus discovered unknown parts of the world despite suffering from Ankylosing Spondylitis. Pierre-Auguste Renoir’s impressionist paintings concealed his battle with Rheumatoid Arthritis. Even long-time actress Angela Lansbury and contemporary singer Lady Gaga have overcome arthritis to enjoy successful careers.

According to a 2014 report by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), close to 4 million Australians have been diagnosed with one of over a hundred forms of rheumatic diseases, commonly known as arthritis. It’s safe to say that at some stage either you or someone you know will be affected by this chronic disability which affects 1 in 5 Australians.

While most of us think this is a condition that only has an effect on the elderly, almost half of those who suffer from arthritis are of working age. Arthritis has a huge impact on quality of life as most sufferers struggle with loss of mobility, pain, stiffness and swelling in various joints in the body. But in order to effectively treat and manage arthritis, it’s important to correctly identify the type of arthritis you or a loved one may be suffering from.

MOST COMMON TYPES OF ARTHRITIS

Osteoarthritis (OA)

The most common and fastest growing form of arthritis around the world, Osteoarthritis is caused by the loss of cartilage that surrounds the ends of bones. These “shock absorbers” may wear due to excessive use, injury or obesity. Weight bearing joints such as knees, hips and feet may swell and become stiff and painful, affecting most basic daily activities.
Osteoarthritis becomes apparent gradually over months or years, and symptoms include aching pain, stiffness after times of inactivity, as well as weak hands and painful spurs on hands and feet. The effects of OA are felt throughout the day as those who are diagnosed have limited strength and flexibility to do everyday tasks such as turning on taps, opening jars, even getting dressed or picking up small items. Mobility is affected as walking, bending, or climbing stairs becomes difficult.

OA generally impacts those who are over 40, have a family history of arthritis, are obese, or have had a joint injury or infection in the past.

**Rheumatoid arthritis (RA)**

Unlike Osteoarthritis which is a result of physical wear and tear on the joints, Rheumatoid Arthritis is triggered when the body’s immune system wrongly attacks healthy joints the way it would normally fight against bacteria and viruses. Symptoms such as joint pain, swelling, and stiffness in hands and feet are similar to OA but Rheumatoid Arthritis also extends to other moving parts in the body such as wrists and elbows, shoulders, hips, jaws and neck.

In some cases, organs such as the heart, lungs and eyes might also be affected and many sufferers struggle with fatigue and loss of appetite. Symptoms of RA tend to be more severe and debilitating than other forms of arthritis and can last for hours, making daily activities very difficult.

RA impacts more women than men, and can start between the ages of 35 and 50.

**Gout**

We largely think of Gout as an old man’s disease and to a certain extent, that’s true. Gout generally impacts men and can occur between the ages of 40 and 60. A very definitive type of arthritis, Gout is primarily found in the big toe though it can extend to other common joints such as ankles, knees, elbows and wrists.

An “attack” of Gout starts with pain and swelling, usually following an illness or injury, and could last from a few hours to a few weeks before settling back to normal. Fed by excess uric acid in the body, Gout can be the result of previous joint injury, chemotherapy, certain immune suppressants, or lifestyle factors such as excessive alcohol or crash diets.

Sufferers can develop lumps under the skin from urate crystals around their joints and painful kidney
If left untreated, Gout can become more severe over time and become a chronic condition.

**Ankylosing spondylitis (AS)**

Another form of arthritis that primarily targets men is Ankylosing Spondylitis - an inflammation of the joints and ligaments along the spine. Similar to Rheumatoid Arthritis, AS is caused by immune system attacks on tendons and ligaments that attach to bone and is usually found along the spine, lower back, and in some cases hands and feet.

A hereditary form of arthritis, AS can start in the teenage years and over time can cause the spinal vertebrae to fuse together, making the spine inflexible. This rigidity in the spine can in turn affect the functional movement of shoulders, hips, and knees. Smokers with Ankylosing Spondylitis should consider giving up their habit as they suffer a much faster rate of spinal damage than non-smokers.

**Juvenile idiopathic arthritis (JIA)**

The umbrella term of Juvenile Arthritis refers to those forms of arthritis that touch the youngest members of our population; those who are under 16 years old. Some of the commonly known ones include Lupus, Scleroderma, and Kawasaki disease. Symptoms, treatments, and pain management for JIA are different from adult versions of arthritis because those affected are still growing and developing.

JIA generally affects girls more than boys with about 1 in every 1000 children suffering from the disease. Some of those who are diagnosed can show little to no symptoms while others may need to be treated for severe pain and discomfort. Like adult arthritis, JIA can affect bones and joints but it could also affect skin, eyes, and organs.

Outside of the physical effect of the condition, symptoms of JIA can have an impact on a child’s athletic ability, as well as day to day school and play activities. This in turn can affect friendships, self-confidence, resilience and motivation. As such, various medical professionals as well as the school, family, and local community need to be involved in the care and management of the youngest. Luckily, in most instances, JIA does not have a lasting effect.

**Lupus (SLE)**

Systemic Lupus Erythematosus is the most common form of Lupus, and is yet another form of arthritis
that is caused by an improperly functioning immune system. More prevalent in women under 45, and particularly those of African or Asian descent, SLE is a result of the immune system’s attacks on connective tissue in the body - which in turn may cause damage to various organs such as the kidneys, brain and skin.

Some of the prevailing signs of the condition include joint pain, fatigue, light sensitivity and hair loss. But for some, symptoms can be severe, life threatening, and can include breathing issues, kidney problems and blood disorders. Lupus may be hereditary - particularly in those who are predisposed to developing the Eppstein-Barr virus (EBV), but may also be caused by environmental factors such as smoking, stress, and exposure to the sun.

**What to do if you think you have arthritis**

If you are experiencing chronic joint pain, swelling or muscle stiffness on an ongoing basis, you can find a great deal of information about potential causes through organisations such as Arthritis Australia. Many of us dismiss certain symptoms as a normal part of ageing or you might even think that you’re too young to have arthritis.

A good place to start is by scheduling an appointment with your doctor. Your GP will assess your medical history, send you for additional tests, or refer you to a specialist for an accurate diagnosis. There are many other conditions such as Osteoporosis, Bursitis and Chronic Fatigue which are also associated with aching joints and tiredness, but these should not be confused with arthritis as their causes and treatments may be entirely different.

While there is no cure for arthritis, once you and your doctor have confirmed your exact diagnosis, your symptoms can be managed through medication, surgery, and lifestyle changes.

**References**

1. www.arthritis.org American Arthritis Foundation
For many people, the thought of having arthritis is a scary one as they imagine hands curled in pain, achy knees, and limited ability to do common daily tasks. Arthritis affects the body’s soft tissue, muscles, tendons, and cartilage triggering symptoms that cause a range of inflammatory illnesses and in some cases, can lead to other disorders.

Arthritis does not discriminate against age, though many people think this is not a condition that affects the young. Yet only half of those affected would be considered elderly, with children and those of working age not being immune to the disease. This means the impact of arthritis can be felt on work, family life, and the community - so it’s important to know what to look for in order to diagnose it early and manage it well.

**Common signs and symptoms**

**Lower back pain and stiffness** – Back pain is primarily a symptom of several types of spinal arthritis but is more prevalent in Ankylosing Spondylitis, Osteoarthritis, as well as Rheumatoid Arthritis. The breakdown of cartilage along the spine causes the bones to move and create spurs that press on nerves, leading to pain.

The movement of bone can also trigger inflammation of the ligaments and muscles that are attached to the bone and eventually damage the vertebra of the spine. Arthritis related back pain is usually felt most in the lower back as this area bears a good part of the body’s weight.

**Fatigue** – Feeling tired and lethargic can be one of the earliest signs of arthritis as proteins are released into the blood weeks and months before other symptoms become apparent. These proteins can cause symptoms not dissimilar to those of the flu or a bad cold. Fatigue can also come on later as the body and mind fight against the pain and inflammation caused by arthritis. It can become a vicious cycle as tiredness exacerbates the pain and the pain causes the person to be more
tired. Lack of sleep and certain medications can also add to the feeling of weariness.

**Stiffness and inflammation** – Two common symptoms of virtually all types of arthritis are stiffness and swelling of the joints, although the type of swelling may vary according to the type of arthritis. Inflamed joints are the result of excess fluid in the joint lining, which in turn increases blood flow and releases inflammatory peptides (a chain of amino acids) into the soft tissue around the joints. The result is red, inflamed joints that are painful and warm to the touch.

Stiffness is a direct result of inflamed joints and is particularly troublesome in the early morning or after periods of inactivity during the day. Stiffness is not always partnered with pain; it is a dull ache with restricted movement that can last less than an hour as your joints and muscles get moving, or longer depending on the type of arthritis.

Inflammation and stiffness tend to be symmetrical, so it's likely that both knees, feet, ankles or shoulders are affected at the same time. Flare ups can last for days or weeks and are likely to increase over time.

**Numbness** – Many arthritis sufferers will complain of numbness in joints such as elbows, ankles and wrists. Inflammation causes swollen joints to push against nerves producing numbness and tingling.

**Low grade fever** – Feeling feverish is a particularly common symptom of Rheumatoid Arthritis and usually accompanies inflammation and swelling in the body. It's important to note that the fever experienced with arthritis is similar to one you may experience when having a cold. A particularly high fever is generally a sign of infection in the body and should be addressed quickly.

**Limited range of motion** – Fluid accumulation and cartilage deterioration around a joint can cause it to change its shape and mechanical ability. The result is a limited ability to flex, bend, or fully straighten a joint. Daily physical movements that most of us take for granted such as bending, straightening, climbing steps and certain exercise may become difficult and frustrating. Gentle, daily exercises may help to maintain or decrease the decline in range of motion.
Insomnia – It seems fairly logical to assume that pain and stiffness could make sleep more difficult and to some extent, this is true. However, the connection between pain and sleep is a bit like the chicken or the egg discussion. Lack of good sleep can increase inflammation, thus increasing pain. Sometimes lack of sleep may just increase perceived pain rather than the actual level of pain. Lack of sleep can also increase stress hormones and make the pain of arthritis harder to bear.

For many people, pain may not stop them falling asleep, but it may wake them up in the middle of the night - in which case, doctors may recommend taking over the counter pain medication closer to bed time as a solution.

Depression – According to Arthritis Australia, the emotional effects of arthritis are felt by over 60% of those affected by the condition and studies by the US Arthritis Foundation suggest that 40% of those diagnosed with Rheumatoid Arthritis suffer from depression.

It’s understandable that chronic pain and limited mobility, as well as fear and frustration of the impact on daily life, would influence a person’s mood. More importantly, the symptoms of arthritis can limit social interactions, recreational activities, even the ability to get around independently. This in turn can lead to low self-esteem and confidence.

Depression should be recognised and treated early as the effects are long-reaching: in many cases leading to a deterioration of relationships at work, and most importantly with friends and loved ones.

Risks related to arthritis – When it comes to developing arthritis, we can’t change our age, genetics, or heredity but there are certain risk factors that we can control. Excessive weight, injuries (due to sport or other activities), tasks involving prolonged repetitive movement (as in certain occupations) can also contribute to arthritis and the chances increase with age. These are risks that we could potentially lower through lifestyle changes, diet and exercise.

On the flip side, arthritis can lead to other conditions and complications. Immune related forms of arthritis such as Rheumatoid Arthritis can lead to scores of other diseases such as Osteoporosis, heart and
lung issues, Anaemia, dry eyes and mouth, and cancers such as non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma.

Those diagnosed with Osteoarthritis should be mindful of developing Diabetes and heart disease - a result of inactivity. Obesity is linked to both the development of arthritis due to the pressure extra weight can place on joints, as well as a side-effect of insufficient physical movement due to joint pain. It’s important to be vigilant of the risks that may facilitate arthritis and related diseases in order to lessen the impact early on.

Importance of identifying symptoms

Arthritis symptoms and their severity can vary from one person to the next. Your GP or specialist will guide you in pursuing therapeutic or surgical methods while government, community and online resources might help with lifestyle and diet advice as well as support resources.

References

1. www.arthritis.org American Arthritis Foundation
Diagnosis and Treatment of Arthritis

Diagnosing Arthritis

With over 100 types of arthritic conditions and various other non-arthritic ailments with similar symptoms, an accurate diagnosis is essential before moving forward with treatment. Once your doctor has confidently diagnosed you with arthritis, you can work out how to manage your symptoms. The first step is to see your GP, who will use some or all of the following tools to hone in on an exact diagnosis:

**Physical exam** – Doctors such as your GP can visually check for swollen joints, test your mobility, and discuss any other symptoms you may have. They will also discuss family history, lifestyle factors, and prior medical history of injuries or illnesses.

**Blood tests** – Blood tests can identify general factors such as liver and kidney functions, blood counts and hormone levels. Their benefit to diagnosing arthritis comes from their ability to identify inflammation level, rheumatoid factors, genetic markers, and autoimmune disorders.

In some cases, blood tests can help diagnose a particular type of arthritis such as Osteoarthritis by ruling out other diseases. Once you are under treatment for arthritis, blood tests can identify the effectiveness and side effects of any medication that's being taken.

**Imaging tests** – X-rays and MRIs may be ordered to check for clues inside the bodies. While X-rays can identify structural issues with bones and joints, an MRI can go deeper and identify inflammation, excess fluid levels, as well as soft tissue and cartilage damage.

**Specialists** – A referral to a specialist such as a rheumatologist or orthopaedist may be necessary once a general diagnosis has been made as they can do a much more thorough assessment. A specialist is also able to access drug therapies that may not be available to your GP, as well as recommend surgical options.
Treating Arthritis

Once you have a specific diagnosis of the type of arthritis you’re facing, you’ll find that there are a range of treatments to manage the day-to-day discomfort associated with your specific type.

Depending on the severity of your symptoms, arthritis treatment can include over-the-counter or prescription drugs, injections, as well as surgery. Your doctor will discuss the best option for your condition and less invasive solutions will be tried before progressing to more aggressive treatments.

Medications

Drug therapy is usually the first port of call and the most commonly used treatment available. There are many options available with progressive effect.

Analgesics – One of the simplest ways to treat arthritis pain is by taking paracetamol (also known as acetaminophen), which can provide relief from mild arthritis pain. Stronger versions of this medication may include opiates as well as combinations of paracetamol and codeine. Analgesics can be taken as needed or as an ongoing preventative measure to assist with pain management but won’t help with the underlying inflammation. It’s important to take care when pairing these drugs with others such as prescriptions and cold and flu medicines, as you might exceed the maximum daily dose of a particular ingredient.

NSAIDs (Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) – Unlike analgesics, which work on pain receptors, NSAIDs such as naproxen and ibuprofen reduce discomfort by blocking inflammation producing substances called prostaglandins. These types of anti-inflammatories may work on pain that can’t be addresses by simple analgesics and are particularly useful for those who struggle with Rheumatoid Arthritis.

With both prescription and non-prescription NSAIDs on offer, there is a bit of trial and error to determine which one works best for you. Side effects of NSAIDs may include risk of high blood pressure, blood clots, stomach ulcers, heart disease and stroke, and can increase depending on dose and length of use. So it’s very important to work closely with your doctor to determine the best dose and duration to suit you.
DMARDs (Disease modifying anti-rheumatic drugs) – Used primarily for inflammatory forms of arthritis such as Rheumatoid Arthritis, Ankylosing Spondylitis and Lupus. DMARDs are considered to be a type of immunosuppressant as they block a faulty immune system from doing harm to healthy cells. If the drugs are effective, they will stop or slow damage to joints and organs caused by inflammation.

While this group of drugs can be very effective, they are slow to work – sometimes taking weeks or months before you see any improvement. Your specialist will constantly monitor your blood results to gauge the effectiveness of the medications you have been prescribed as well as any unwanted side-effects.

Corticosteroids – Corticosteroids imitate a naturally occurring hormone called Cortisol, which prevents certain elements in our bodies from causing inflammation. They are a powerful anti-inflammatory and can reduce the effects of severe pain and swelling. Corticosteroids can be used in low doses for long term treatment, or in higher doses for quick relief from severe inflammation while you’re waiting for other drugs such as DMARDs to take effect. They are generally prescribed in low doses as side effects including high blood pressure, osteoporosis and susceptibility to infection can increase at higher levels.

Biologics – One of the newer forms of treatment, Biologics are gaining in popularity, particularly for those with severe symptoms of Rheumatoid Arthritis. Generally used as a last measure when other drugs are not working, Biologics are genetically engineered from human proteins and are classified as “organic” DMARDs. Similar to DMARDs, they block immune signals that can destroy healthy cells, thus slowing any additional damage. However, their side effects can range from mild to quite severe and should be carefully monitored.

Biologic therapy is administered by injection and mild reactions such as a rash at the injection site, fever, or headaches are the most commonly seen reactions. However, a more serious side effect can include a flare up of latent diseases such as tuberculosis, risk of developing pneumonia, and can increase the threat of lymphoma.

Surgery

Once oral and injectable medication has been exhausted in the treatment of arthritis, or if your symptoms are severe, then a surgical course of action
might be the next step. Surgery can be used for several different outcomes and benefits can include less pain, better alignment, as well as greater range of motion and flexibility.

You can discuss surgical options with your doctor when your pain prevents you from performing simple daily tasks or participating in activities you enjoy. Generally, an orthopaedic surgeon will discuss with you whether the surgery is likely to provide any benefit. In some cases, the specialist may not recommend surgery, but if it is recommended, the final decision is yours. Here are some of the more common surgical options:

**Keyhole Surgery (Arthroscopy)** – this is one of the most common surgical methods of relieving pain and gaining better mobility by addressing simple issues such
Important tips related to diagnosis and treatment

To get the most out of your diagnosis and treatment for arthritis, there are a few things you should keep in mind:

1. **For an accurate diagnosis** – keep track of your symptoms, discuss the results of lab tests with your healthcare provider and make an informed choice about your course of treatment.

2. **To get the most out of your medication** – be aware of the expected outcomes, side effects, and potential risks of combining with other medication.

3. **Prepare for surgery** – work with your doctor to determine if surgery is your best option, be clear of the expected outcomes, and plan for recovery, care, and support.

While the cure for arthritis is yet to be found, there are resources available to help combat the symptoms through medical means, lifestyle changes, as well as community and family support.

**References**

1. [www.arthritis.org](http://www.arthritis.org) American Arthritis Foundation

“Arthritis: Help is at Hand”
It goes without saying that living with arthritis can be difficult in many ways, yet those unaffected by the condition don’t fully understand the depth of the challenge. On the surface, this is just a physical ailment that causes pain and discomfort. But a deeper look will show that in its worst forms, arthritis can affect a person’s emotional health, ability to live independently, interact with family and friends, and just enjoy day-to-day life.

A surprising 20% of the Australian population suffer from arthritis, so it’s important that those afflicted with the condition use everything in their arsenal to manage their symptoms and make life as enjoyable as possible.

Get the most from your health care professionals

The most important support system for someone with arthritis, besides friends and family, is the community of health professionals that can provide assistance.

General Practitioner – GPs are the very first stop on the way to treatment and diagnosis, but their job doesn’t end there. It’s important to have a strong relationship with a GP that you see regularly, even if you are receiving specific treatment from a specialist. A good GP will know your history, your current treatment methods, and provide support and advice on an ongoing basis.

Specialist – In most cases, the specialists that play a major role in arthritis care are rheumatologists and orthopaedic surgeons. Both specialties include paediatric doctors who focus on children, and can therefore treat conditions such as Juvenile Arthritis. Your GP will refer you to a specialist based on your diagnosis.

A rheumatologist specialises in musculoskeletal and rheumatic diseases which affect joints, muscles, and bones. These may include arthritis, osteoporosis, autoimmune diseases, and other joint problems. A rheumatologist will generally offer treatment in the form of oral medication, injections, or physical therapy.
An orthopaedic surgeon specialises in treating musculoskeletal issues through surgery. Orthopaedists treat injuries and abnormalities to improve joint functionality. Within this specialty, there may be those who specialise in specific parts of the body such as the hip, knee, or spine as well as those who specialise in a specific type of surgery such as keyhole surgery or joint replacement.

**Occupational Therapist (OT)**
Contrary to popular belief, occupational therapists don’t just treat those who are disabled or recuperating from a severe injury. In fact, an OT provides support to anyone struggling with their specific daily physical demands. For an arthritic, this may include navigating stairs, cooking or doing the shopping, even getting dressed. An OT will show you how to work around your stiffness and pain to effectively manage these activities.

**Physiotherapist and Exercise Physiologist** – Both of these professions offer advice on exercise, posture, and ways to minimise pain. Whereas a physio may use massage and manipulation to offer pain relief, an exercise physiologist will focus on teaching behavioural solutions and exercises so patients can learn to manage their own pain.

**Other professionals** –
Professionals such as dieticians, podiatrists, even your pharmacist can offer support in the management of arthritis. Dieticians can assist with weight management in order to relieve pressure on joints. Podiatrists can help with issues affecting feet, particularly for those suffering from Gout.

One of the most overlooked professions that plays a huge role in our health is that of the pharmacist. Filling all your prescriptions at the same pharmacy allows the pharmacist to get to know you and offer advice on drug interactions and side effects of all the medication you may be taking. In some instances, a pharmacy may even offer to keep your scripts on file and send you a reminder when a new one is due.

**Manage the pain and fatigue**

The hardest thing about living with arthritis is coping with the pain and stiffness caused by swollen joints. Pain affects everyone in different ways; some might experience a constant low level of pain, while others have severe flare-ups that immobilise them.
Fatigue and stress are part of the “pain cycle” as pain can make you tired and stressed about your ability to get through the day; at the same time, fatigue can make the pain seem worse than it is. There are several ways to alleviate the impact of pain and fatigue.

**Medication** – Work with your healthcare professionals to take the right medication. Arthritis medication might include pain relief drugs, anti-inflammatories, injections, and topical creams. Be sure to keep track of your dosage, drug interactions, and side effects: your doctor and pharmacist can help with that.

**Good health** – We all know that a healthy weight, regular exercise and good diet will help us live a longer and more comfortable life. This is especially true of those who struggle with arthritis pain. If you’re overweight, losing a few kilos will reduce the pressure on painful joints, while exercise can strengthen muscles that support those joints. While there is no specific eating plan for arthritis, a well-balanced diet will improve overall health and provide nutrients to get you through your day.

**Support aids** – Most of us tend to fight using support equipment for fear that they might draw attention to our weaknesses. But if these aids can help to simplify daily life and make it less painful, then the benefits far outweigh any superficial concerns.

Support aids can be obvious things such as canes, walkers, and wheelchairs, but they can also include little tools such as jar openers, long shoe horns, knee pads, and bath seats. In fact, there are aids that can help you in just about any room in your house from the kitchen, the bathroom and out to the yard. Why not use them so you can keep cooking, gardening, and shopping independently?

**Conserve your energy**

Coping with arthritis can drain both physical and mental energy, but there are several strategies you can use to combat this tiredness.

**Prioritise** – We all have things we want to do in any given day, but if you’re struggling with pain and stiffness, you may not get through your whole “to do” list. So it’s important to prioritise; put the most important items at the top of your list and don’t stress if the less important things don’t get done.

**Plan ahead** – For most of us, daily tasks generally include cooking a meal, doing laundry or
shopping for groceries, and you’ve likely found ways to manage these jobs. For unusually demanding situations such as cooking for guests or doing some heavy yard work, forward planning will help accomplish it with minimal impact on your joints.

Break the job up into smaller tasks and be sure to rest in between. In some cases, it might help to tackle a big job during the part of the day when you generally feel your best, such as mid-morning after your joints have worked through the morning stiffness or just after you’ve taken your pain medication.

**Be flexible** – One of the hardest things to accept when we’re determined to do something is the physical inability to perform a task. So on days when the pain and

WHILE YOU MAY BE TEMPTED TO HIDE FROM THE WORLD... THE BEST THING TO DO IS TO REACH OUT AND CONNECT WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS.
stiffness is particularly bad, or you’re feeling exceptionally tired, there’s no harm in delaying, cancelling, or asking for help to get things done.

Maintain relationships

While you may be tempted to hide from the world when you’re feeling anxious or depressed about the restrictions you have to live with, the best thing to do is to reach out and connect with family and friends, or get involved with social activities.

Family and friends – Your self-esteem may be battered by your lack of independence but those who love and care for you can generally see past your limitations and would be happy to help you in any way that they can.

Partner – The relationship most affected by arthritis is probably the one you have with your partner. Your symptoms may keep you from being physically intimate, or make you self-conscious about the way that you look. Having an open conversation about your concerns will show you that more than likely, your partner probably doesn’t notice the “flaws” that you see and just wants to be close to you.

Professional and social relationships – Having arthritis doesn’t mean that you should stop working or participating in social activities that you enjoy. More than half of those affected by arthritis are of working age, so maintaining a career can offer a feeling of accomplishment. Even limited participation in social affiliations such as sporting activities or volunteer organisations can lessen the feeling of isolation and offer a sense of fulfilment.

Take control

Arthritis may not be something that you can control, but how you live with it could be the difference between a lonely, unfulfilled life and one that is rewarding and enjoyable. Use the tools at your disposal to minimise the physical symptoms, ask for help when you need it, and don’t cut yourself off from those who love and care for you.

References

1. www.arthritis.org American Arthritis Foundation
4. www.rheumatology.org American College of Rheumatology “What is a Rheumatologist?”
Arthritis and Food

Food is such an important part of our lives - it provides us with nutrition, offers comfort, and binds us culturally. Whether you’re a gourmet cook who loves to feed others and experiment with recipes, or someone who cooks purely for sustenance, preparing and eating food takes up a good part of any given day.

Ultimately, the food we eat needs to taste good and give us energy, and though there is no specific diet for arthritis, there are certain foods that can be beneficial, while others are best eaten in moderation. There are ways to look after yourself by being clever about the way you work in the kitchen and include beneficial foods that will keep the discomfort at bay.

Smart strategies

Most households can benefit from planning ahead. For the average family, lack of planning could mean no packed lunches, unhealthy takeaways, and extra trips to the shops. For someone with arthritis, this lack of planning could actually aggravate the painful symptoms and swelling of arthritis, so here are some great tips and tricks to make mealtimes easier:

Plan your meals – Weekly meal planning can take the stress out of what you’re going to eat every night. Planning can also help you make a comprehensive shopping list so you can limit the number of trips to the shops.

Shop wisely - If you can, do your shopping when the stores are quiet, so you can park closer to the entrance and go through the aisles at your leisure without being jostled by the crowds. Better yet, do your shopping online and have your groceries delivered.

If you do prefer to shop in person, be sure to take sturdy bags that are easy to grip, or use a rolling shopping trolley. If you need some help, ask at the service counter: most large supermarkets are happy to help you load the car.

Prep in advance – When available, buy pre-cut veggies, prewashed salads, or frozen vegetables. If you prefer to prep your own, then take the time to do so when you’re feeling your strongest, or ask a friend or family member to help you. It’s so much easier to put a meal together when the base ingredients are already prepped and portioned.
Invest in helpful tools and gadgets – Be sure to have good quality pots and pans that are not too heavy, easy to clean and have a comfortable grip. Invest in gadgets such as easy to open storage canisters, ergonomic utensils, or an easy grip jar and can opener. You can also find plates with guards and no slip bowls to keep food and items from sliding around.

Cook in bulk – Cooking in bulk is a practical way to save time and effort, so cook up a big batch and freeze a few portions for those days when you’re too tired to cook. Most soups, curries, and sauces freeze well and make a tasty, nutritious meal for another day.

Keep it simple – Unless you’re entertaining, there’s no need to cook complicated recipes that require a lot of steps. Collect recipes that are quick, tasty and nutritious for simple meal preparation that doesn’t aggravate your symptoms.

Healthy diet

The healing effects of food have been linked to fighting digestive issues, heart disease, even cancer. While there is no scientific proof that what we eat can cure diseases, there is documented evidence that certain foods can have a positive effect on your body.

We all know that eating fresh fruits and vegetables, seeds, nuts, and lean proteins are good for your general health. For arthritis sufferers, eating foods that boost the immune system, fight inflammation, and strengthen bones can contribute to a stronger body and less pain and discomfort. There are certain foods, however, that can help to minimise the effects of arthritis pain and swelling.

Head for the fruit and vegetable aisle – The produce section at your supermarket or your local fruit and veg shop are chock full of foods that offer a great deal of anti-inflammatory properties. Be sure to take in a mix of vibrant colours for optimum nutrition.

Citrus fruits such as oranges, lemons, kiwis pack a punch of vitamin C which is shown to prevent inflammation and help promote healthy joints. Powerful cruciferous vegetables such as broccoli, cauliflower, and brussel sprouts are high in calcium, and other vitamins that promote stronger bones. Those who eat diets rich in flavour enhancers such as garlic, onion, and leeks have been known to delay signs of Osteoarthritis.

Get more calcium, magnesium and vitamin D – Our bodies need a variety of nutrients, but foods rich in calcium, magnesium and vitamin D will provide optimum support for stronger bones. Regular intake of low fat dairy foods such as milk, cheese and yogurt, leafy greens such as spinach, kale and collard
greens as well as magnesium rich sweet potatoes and beets offer a good supply of these key vitamins.  

Increase your Omega 3s – Just about every food article on the news, your favourite lifestyle magazine, or a health website will promote the benefits of Omega 3 to control joint pain and stiffness as well as a healthy heart. These essential fats are found in abundance in fish such as salmon, tuna, and anchovies, among others. Vegetarian sources of omega 3 can be found in walnuts and walnut oil, flaxseeds, chia seeds, as well as tofu and edamame.

Antioxidants – Top rheumatologists at NYU's Langone Medical Centre recommend jewel toned fruits and vegetables such as juicy berries, carrots, red onions, and apples for their inflammation fighting properties. A soothing cup of green tea will not only give you an opportunity to relax and energise, regular use of green tea can help block the production of substances that cause joint damage.

Lower your CRP – C-reactive proteins are a marker for inflammation with links to diabetes and heart disease, commonly associated with arthritis. Foods that lower CRPs include oatmeal, brown rice and wholegrain cereals as well as high-fibre, protein rich kidney, pinto, and black beans. Nuts, seeds, fish, and healthy oils such as olive and canola are also effective at lowering CRP and of particular benefit to those struggling with the effects of Rheumatoid Arthritis.

Spice things up – A healthy diet doesn’t have to mean bland, tasteless food. Bring out the best in your foods and lower the inflammation in your body with flavour boosters such as ginger, garlic, cinnamon, and turmeric. Fresh herbs such as basil, thyme and rosemary can also add a huge punch of flavour while allowing you to lower your use of salt and sugar.

Foods to avoid

The American journal of Clinical Nutrition warns that inflammation in the body can increase by eating certain foods that we all know to be unhealthy on a regular basis. Try to avoid these foods on a daily basis, but enjoy them as a treat once in a while.

Sugar - Processed sugar including substitutes such as aspartame, fructose, sucrose as well as packaged cakes, cookies and chocolates should be limited as it is too much sugar is a strong contributor to inflammation in the body.

Fat - Saturated fats such as full fat dairy, red meat, and white pasta, and trans-fats such as those found in fried food, processed food and margarine can worsen arthritis inflammation and affect heart health.
High GI foods – Foods with a high glycaemic index, a measure of how quickly your body breaks it down, can feed products in the body that cause inflammation. So steer clear of white rice, regular potatoes, white bread, rolls and crackers.

Eat your way to maximum health

There are times when we all complain about having to run to the shops because we’ve run out of something, or having to cook a meal at the end of a long day at work; for those with the pain and swelling caused by arthritis, these chores are doubly difficult.

Combining strategies that make shopping, preparing, and cooking a bit easier, with a diet that is rich in anti-inflammatory foods, could help reduce some of the painful symptoms of arthritis. While you might be tempted to take supplements such as fish oil or vitamin C, these should truly just support your diet as your body absorbs many more nutrients from fresh, whole food. So feed your body well and maximise your health.

Combining smart strategies, good planning, and a diet that is rich in anti-inflammatory foods, could help reduce some of the painful symptoms of arthritis. A healthy diet will also keep weight in check, placing less pressure on already stressed bones and joints.

References

1. www.arthritis.org American Arthritis Foundation
The old saying that you have to “use it or lose it” is especially true for those who struggle with arthritic joints. Although the natural instinct to deal with painful and swollen joints is to rest and minimise movement, there are greater benefits to be had through exercise.

Without consistent physical activity, joints can become stiffer, muscles get weaker and range of motion is affected. Simple tasks such as reaching or even bending your legs enough to walk up the stairs can become more difficult.

Types of exercise

Depending on the severity of your symptoms, there are various types of exercise to choose from, and it’s best to choose an activity that appeals to you because you’re likely to stick with it long term.

Aerobics – For general fitness, an activity that uses the larger muscles in your body will strengthen your heart and lungs and get the feel-good endorphins going. Aerobic exercise can include walking, dancing, cycling, or any activity that uses the whole body. Be sure to wear good support shoes and do just a bit more than you think you can, so you can stretch yourself.

Strength training – Exercising with weights doesn’t have to involve a gym full of equipment, and you don’t need to look like a bodybuilder to feel the benefits of strength training. A light dumbbell, resistance bands and the machine circuit at the gym can improve muscle tone and strengthen bones to support weak joints.

Flexibility – One of the biggest impacts of arthritis pain and swelling is the loss of flexibility and range of movement. Other than daily stretching, the best exercises to oil your creaky joints, are gentle methods such as yoga, pilates, and tai chi.

These ancient disciplines combine gentle movements, extended postures, and meditation for a mind-body experience that really suits many who struggle with the daily discomfort of arthritis. On a day when a strength training workout or even a walk around the neighbourhood seems too hard, a bit of yoga or tai chi in the living room might be just what’s needed.
**Incidental exercise** – Most of us forget that playing with children or pets, gardening, or an active hobby or sport can raise your heart rate, burn some calories and make you feel good too.
You can also add to your fitness by parking a bit further away than you need to, taking the stairs instead of the lift, or catching up with friends for a walk instead of a coffee.

**Water exercises** – Exercising in water is one of the best ways to overcome arthritic symptoms, and luckily, you don’t need to know how to swim. Whether you engage in traditional swimming or a hydrotherapy class at the gym, exercising in a warm pool can be extremely beneficial, particularly for those struggling with symptoms of Rheumatoid Arthritis.

Arthritis sufferers can find relief during water exercises as the buoyancy of water can take a great deal of pressure off aching joints. Warm water exercise classes and hydrotherapy sessions are available through hospitals, physiotherapists, and even larger gyms.

**How to get started and when to exercise**

It may be difficult to know which exercise is right for you, whether it will provide the benefits you need and how much movement your body can cope with. The best place to start is with your doctor, who may recommend certain exercises or refer you to an occupational therapist or physiotherapist.

If you’ve had surgery to deal with your arthritis pain, then the osteopath is likely to put you on a specific program that includes exercises to strengthen and increase flexibility.

A consistent exercise program that includes at least 30 minutes of exercise each day will provide the most benefit for stiff and aching joints. If you haven’t exercised in a while, then start with just 10 minutes and work your way up over days or weeks as your body feels stronger. Always warm up before the main workout and cool down at the end.

The best time to exercise is the time of day when you feel your strongest and when the pain medication is most effective. On a day when the pain is quite bad or you’re feeling very tired, a stretch or a quick session of yoga or tai chi will provide a bit of relief.

If you’re hesitant to exercise in public or feel intimidated by the gym environment, there are many other options available. Walk in your own neighbourhood, start your own class with a few friends at a local church or community centre, or exercise in your own living room with a DVD.
Move and stretch for optimum health

Exercise is an essential part of managing arthritis pain and stiffness and its benefits should not be underestimated. It’s important to make exercise a regular part of the day, the same as eating or sleeping as the benefits of consistent daily movement are enormous. It can help you get fit and control your weight so you place less stress on your joints, lower stress levels, and make you feel stronger and more confident.

“A consistent exercise program that includes at least 30 minutes of exercise each day will provide the most benefit for stiff and aching joints.”

References
1. www.arthritis.org American Arthritis Foundation
Alternative Therapies for Arthritis

When coping with difficult situations, we tend to look for as many solutions as we can find, and for almost one-third of all Australians, finding relief from arthritis discomfort is crucial to living an enjoyable and independent life. While there is statistical proof of the benefits from medical and surgical treatments, alternative methods are not quite so scientific.

ALTERNATIVE THERAPIES

Weight loss and exercise

Though it’s not exactly alternative, losing weight is one of the easiest “therapies” to ease the chronic pain associated with arthritis. Extra weight contributes to pain as bones and joints are subjected to added pressure and stress. Research has shown that there is a proven link between obesity and development of Osteoarthritis, so it’s beneficial to lose weight as a treatment as well as a preventative measure.

Weight loss combined with exercise has the added benefit of keeping creaky joints flexible and strong. Activities that get the heart rate up, such as walking, swimming or cycling, can reduce the risk of developing heart disease and diabetes, which are often associated with arthritis.

Herbs and natural ingredients

For thousands of years, every culture has turned to nature for its medicinal properties. Seeds, roots, and leaves of a variety of plants offer relief from the pain of inflamed joints, most are easily accessible and some might already be in your pantry.
Ginger – The anti-inflammatory properties of ginger can be particularly beneficial for those suffering from Rheumatoid Arthritis. Increase your intake by adding fresh ginger to your tea, your favourite stir-fry recipes and curries.

Green tea – One of the most popular imports from the ancient Chinese culture, drinking green tea regularly may help to reduce inflammation and can be found as a loose tea, in tea bags, and even in tablet form.

Turmeric (curcumin) – With a long history of warding off colds, reducing the risk of heart attacks, and preventing cancer, the super powers of turmeric may also extend to relieving inflammation in arthritic joints. So sprinkle a little of this wonder dust in your favourite recipe or take it in pill form as a regular supplement.

Capsaicin – The primary substance found in chilis and capsicum, capsaicin is a pain blocker that is found in creams and patches that can be applied on painful joints several times per day.

Other barks, vines, and leaves – Some less commonly known herbs such as Boswellia (frankincense), Cat’s Claw, and Willow Bark also show potential for relieving joint pain.

Vitamins and supplements
It’s possible that you already take a multivitamin to make sure your body gets all the nutrients it needs, but there are certain supplements that could provide a very specific benefit to those with chronic pain.

While testing for supplements is overseen by the Therapeutic Goods Administration, it’s not as stringent as the guidelines set out for clinical drugs. It’s important to always check with your doctor before starting any vitamins or supplements as they can cause an allergic reaction or interfere with medication you’re already taking.

Fish oil – Possibly one of the most powerful and best-known supplements for promoting good health, fish oil has been shown to be almost as effective as pain killers such as ibuprofen when it comes to relieving the tenderness caused by arthritis inflammation. The omega-3 fats in fish oil are very effective for arthritis, but they need to be taken in high doses to reduce inflammation. So it’s best to include fish in your regular diet and top up with a fish oil supplement.

Vitamins C, D and Magnesium - Although many vitamins play a role in your body’s health, C and D vitamins as well as magnesium are particularly beneficial for their ability to support the immune system, control inflammation and promote healthy bones.

While you can take these vitamins in pill form, the best way to get your
magnesium and C is through a diet rich in the right fruits and vegetables, plus a few rays of sunshine to boost your vitamin D.

**Glucosamine and Chondroitin** – Although there are insufficient studies to prove the effectiveness of either of these substances, recent research suggests that taking glucosamine and chondroitin together may help slow down cartilage damage.

**GLA (Gamma Linolenic Acid)** – GLAs contribute omega-6 fats that are converted by the body into chemicals that improve joint pain and stiffness. A small study has shown that people who took a combination of GLA and fish oil significantly reduced their need for pain killers.

**Mind-body therapies**

We've all heard that the power of positive thinking can enable us to reach our goals and there is a long-held believe that the mind can overcome physical obstacles. Mind techniques such as visualisation and meditation can be successful coping mechanisms for arthritis pain.

If you’re the type of person that needs to do something more tangible than tap into your mind, there are a few tried and tested methods that might help, but you will need to commit to them long-term before you see the benefits.

**Acupuncture** – This ancient Chinese practice uses small, thin needles that are inserted into the skin at very specific points in order to control the flow of energy in the body. The belief is that when the body’s energy flow is disrupted, so is our health, and the needles redirect that energy back onto the right path.

**Tai Chi** – The slow, controlled postures of Tai Chi for Arthritis were specifically designed by medical experts to improve balance and posture, decrease stress, and increase muscle strength in the lower body. Studies have shown that practicing Tai Chi regularly can reduce stiffness and pain and improve flexibility. Your local arthritis office can help you find classes in your area or lend you an instructional DVD.

**Yoga and Qigong** – Similar to Tai Chi, these disciplines can consist of slow and measured movements that improve strength and flexibility. They also combine breathing techniques that calm the mind, and lower blood pressure and inflammation causing cortisol. Many community centres and gyms offer Yoga and Qigong classes, but be sure to speak to the instructor prior to starting a program so she can vary your poses to suit your needs.
Physical and occupational therapy

While this is not a long term solution, when the pain and stiffness of arthritis becomes too debilitating, seeing a physical therapist may be beneficial. A physical therapist might use hot and cold treatment, massage, or gentle manipulation and exercise to make stiff and creaky joints function better.

On the flip side, an occupational therapist (OT) can help you find ways to do your daily tasks within your existing limits. An OT can show you tips and tricks to make things like daily grooming and food preparation easier so you can maintain independence.

Massage and warm baths

Who doesn't love a massage or a warm bath to take away the aches and pains of the day? For those with chronic pain, these are easy therapies that can be weekly or even daily for short term relief.

Massage can improve circulation, increase endorphins, and offer relief to particularly painful joints. Be sure to go to a trained and trusted massage therapist and make them aware of your problem areas so they can apply the right technique. If using massage at home, try creams with capsaicin or Aloe Vera to relieve pain.

It's a well-known fact that warm water can soothe tired muscles, reduce pain, and take the pressure off compressed joints. Try a warm hydrotherapy session at your local gym or if your bathtub allows it, stretch your limbs in a warm bath at home for added relief. Add some Epsom salts to boost magnesium levels and make sure you stay in the warm water for at least 20 minutes to get the most benefit.

Commitment is key

They key to succeeding at any goal, whether it's losing weight, learning a new skill, or fighting an illness, is committing to that course of action. Managing the effects of arthritis is a life-long commitment and you may choose to do so in various different ways.

Whichever alternate therapy you choose, work in conjunction with your healthcare team for the best outcome and allow your family and friends to help and support you.

References
1. www.arthritis.org American Arthritis Foundation
With over one-third of the population affected by some form of arthritis, you probably have a friend, family member or work colleague who has this condition. Those who suffer from milder versions of arthritis are able to manage the pain and discomfort without it affecting their day-to-day activities. In fact, you may not even know they have arthritis.

There are others, however, who struggle with debilitating effects of this painful condition and just getting out of bed may be a daily challenge. As such, carers are an important part of their lives as they provide support in many ways. Carers might be called upon to do a variety of tasks that include physical care, emotional support, or just companionship.

Be an informed carer

In many cases, those who look after someone with a chronic condition are close family members or friends, rather than professionals. The person you're caring for might include a partner, a parent, or even a child, so it may be difficult not to be emotionally overcome by the situation.

It pays to arm yourself with as much practical information as possible, from understanding the effects and progression of the particular type of arthritis, the medication being taken, and the health care professionals involved. If necessary, get written consent from the “patient” so that you can discuss their condition with a doctor or a pharmacist when necessary.

At times, those struggling with their condition can't see past the pain and frustration to focus on the things that might help them such as good nutrition, some form of exercise, and regular medication. They may tend to rely on their carers rather than attempting to be self-sufficient. In these instances, the carer needs to be kind but firm in the amount of support they offer.

Physical care

The amount of care someone needs depends on the severity of their arthritis symptoms. Someone with severe symptoms affecting functionality in most major joints might need help with very personal tasks such as dressing and grooming. They may also need someone to do their grocery shopping, run general
errands, or perform bigger household tasks such as laundry or cleaning.

One of the most annoying effects of arthritis is weakness and stiffness in the hands. Those who have weak hands with a poor grip find even simple tasks such as turning a key or tying a shoelace an incredible chore. Taking care of daily needs such as preparing food, or opening medication becomes unmanageable. A carer might ease the difficulty in food preparation by chopping ingredients or opening cans, and medication can be organised into easy-to-use dispensers for up to two weeks at a time.

Aside from the daily and weekly chores, making sure the person you’re caring for gets regular physical exercise is an important part of arthritis management. This may involve walking or helping with stretches to keep stiff joints as nimble as possible.

**Emotional support**

Persistent chronic pain and restricted physical or social activities can be incredibly frustrating and stressful for an arthritic. Loss of independence can also have an impact on self-confidence and lead to anxiety and depression, so the emotional support a carer can provide is just as important as the physical considerations.

If you’re caring for a friend or family member, ensuring that they have sufficient social contact and encouraging them to participate in activities that they enjoy is extremely important. Even something as simple as afternoon tea with friends, a leisurely walk, or a bit of easy gardening can change the mood and take the focus away from chronic discomfort.

If the person affected is your partner, having to look after their daily needs could put a strain on your interactions with each other making for an unpleasant home environment. For some, the relationship may become stronger but for others, the dynamic could change to become that of a parent caring for a child. It’s important to communicate with each other or seek professional counselling to get back to a healthy partnership.

**Caring for the carer**

If you live with the person you’re looking after, you may have settled into a routine that works well for both of you. If, however, you have your own family, work, and other commitments, then the burden of someone’s physical and emotional health can be both tiring and restrictive.

In either scenario, it’s important that the carer maintain their own interests and find time to do things that they enjoy either by themselves or with the person they’re looking after.
Aside from the physical toll, the emotional toll from a constant sense of responsibility for someone can be very draining. As a carer you may feel that you’re being selfish for wanting to do things for yourself, but it’s much easier to provide support for someone else when you feel strong and happy yourself.

Ways to lessen the strain of taking on a carers role can include eating well to stay healthy, getting regular exercise, and participating in activities that help you retain your own personality. When the role of a carer becomes too difficult to manage, take a break, ask friends or family members to help you, or find a community resource that might be able to offer support.

References
1. www.arthritis.org American Arthritis Foundation
2. www.arthritisaustralia.com.au Arthritis Australia
Arthritis Information and Resources

Managing a functional and happy life with arthritis can sometimes be quite daunting, but there are resources that can help you understand, manage, and overcome the difficulties associated with this chronic condition. Many of these sites offer helpful fact sheets and e-newsletters.

Arthritis support organisations


Arthritis & Osteoporosis NSW [www.arthritisnsw.org.au](http://www.arthritisnsw.org.au)

Arthritis & Osteoporosis ACT [www.arthritisact.org.au](http://www.arthritisact.org.au)

Arthritis & Osteoporosis VIC [www.arthritisvic.org.au](http://www.arthritisvic.org.au)

Arthritis & Osteoporosis QLD [www.arthritis.org.au](http://www.arthritis.org.au)

Arthritis & Osteoporosis NT [www.aont.org.au](http://www.aont.org.au)

Arthritis & Osteoporosis TAS [www.arthritistas.org.au](http://www.arthritistas.org.au)

Arthritis & Osteoporosis WA [www.arthritiswa.org.au](http://www.arthritiswa.org.au)

Arthritis SA [www.arhitissan.org.au](http://www.arhitissan.org.au)

Australian Rheumatology Association [www.rheumatology.org.au](http://www.rheumatology.org.au)

Government resources

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare www.aihw.gov.au

Carer Gateway www.carergateway.gov.au

Health Direct Australia www.healthdirect.gov.au/arthritis

Other useful websites

American Arthritis Foundation www.arthritis.org

Arthritis Research UK www.arthritisresearchuk.org

Exercise and Sports Science Australia www.essa.org.au

National Osteoporosis Foundation (US site) www.nof.org

Occupational Therapy Australia www.otaus.com.au

WebMD Arthritis Health Center www.webmd.com/arthritis