

Arthritis

# Take Control, Live Better





# Arthritis

Arthritis is a breakdown of the cartilage that cushions your joints. A joint is any place where two or more bones connect, like the knee, hip, wrist, or shoulder. When the cartilage wears down, the bones rub against each other. This causes pain and stiffness.

**Osteoarthritis** is the most common form of arthritis. Almost all people older than 65 have it in their hands. A third have it in their knees. It can also affect the joints of the spine, hips, or feet.

When you have arthritis, even simple, everyday movements can hurt. Walking a few steps, opening a door, and even combing your hair can be hard. You may feel especially stiff in the morning until you start moving around.

But there are many things you can do to help with the pain and make it easier for you to move. You can also do things to keep the damage from getting worse. Most people can deal with their symptoms at home with just a little help from their doctor.

## Did You Know?

A lack of exercise can cause your muscles and joints to become weak. But light to moderate exercise can help keep your muscles strong, reduce joint pain and stiffness, and slow the time it takes for arthritis to get worse.



## What you can do

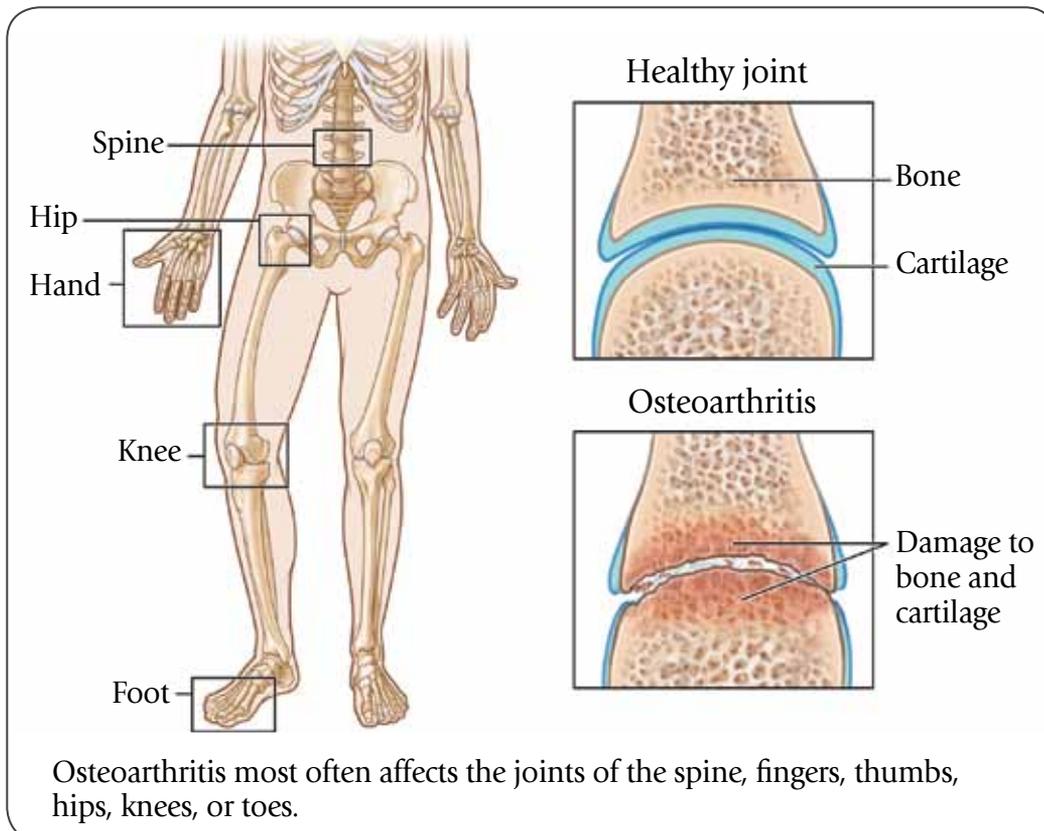
Take steps to reduce pain and stiffness. This can involve medicines, hot and cold treatments, and other things you can do at home.

- ▶ **Get regular exercise.** This can help make you and your joints stronger, more flexible, and better able to move. Choose activities that are easy on your joints, and avoid or change any activity that causes lasting pain.
- ▶ **Use devices and tools** that make it easier for you to do your daily activities.
- ▶ **Reach and stay at a healthy weight.** This puts less stress on your joints.

## When to call your doctor

### Call a doctor if:

- ▶ You have a fever or skin rash along with severe joint pain.
- ▶ You have sudden, unexplained swelling, redness, warmth, or pain in one or more joints.
- ▶ A joint hurts so much that you cannot use it.
- ▶ Joint pain lasts for more than 6 weeks, and home treatment is not helping.
- ▶ You have side effects (stomach pain, nausea, heartburn, or stools that are black or look like tar) from aspirin or other arthritis medicines.





# Treatment

Treatment can help reduce your symptoms and make it possible for you to lead a full and active life.

The goals of treatment are to:

- ▶ Reduce your pain and stiffness.
- ▶ Keep your joints working and moving well.
- ▶ Keep you from becoming disabled.
- ▶ Prevent more damage to your joints.

## Medicines

Medicine can help reduce your symptoms of osteoarthritis and allow you to do your daily activities.

The goal of medicine is to:

- ▶ Get rid of pain with few side effects.
- ▶ Keep your joints working and moving well. If pain keeps you from moving your joints, it can cause the ligaments, tendons, and muscles that move your joints to shorten and become tight and weak.

The type of medicine depends on how bad your pain is. For instance:

- ▶ If your pain is mild, you may only need pain medicines that you can buy without a prescription. These include acetaminophen (Tylenol), aspirin (Bayer, Bufferin), ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin), and naproxen (Aleve). Talk to your doctor about whether these medicines are safe for you and how much to take.
- ▶ If your pain is severe, you may need stronger **prescription medicines**. Because you will take these medicines for a long time, you will need to see your doctor for regular checkups.

Medicines that work for some people don't work for others. Be sure to let your doctor know if the medicine you're taking doesn't help. You may need to try several kinds of medicines to find one that works for you.



## Ice and heat

Many people with arthritis use ice, heat, or both on their sore joints. You may need to try a few approaches until you find what helps you most.

For example:

- ▶ Use heat 2 or 3 times a day for 20 to 30 minutes, using a heating pad, hot shower, or hot pack. Heat seems to work well for pain and stiffness caused by not using a joint.
- ▶ Put ice or a cold pack on a painful joint for 10 to 15 minutes. Be sure to put a thin cloth between the ice and your skin.
- ▶ Try switching between heat and cold.
- ▶ Ask your doctor about heat treatment with paraffin wax. Paraffin wax is a form of moist heat that may help if you have pain and stiffness in your hands or feet.
- ▶ If you are stiff when you wake up in the morning, try a warm shower or bath. Keep moving around after you are done so your joints don't stiffen up.

## Physical therapy

The goal of physical therapy is to make daily tasks and activities easier. For example, it may help with walking, going up stairs, or getting in and out of bed.

Physical therapy almost always includes exercise. It can include stretching, core exercises, weight lifting, and walking. Your physical therapist may teach you an exercise program so you can do it at home.

Your physical therapist also may use manual therapy, education, and techniques such as heat, cold, water, ultrasound, and electrical stimulation.

## Occupational therapy

The goal of occupational therapy is to help people live as independently as possible.

Occupational therapy can include:

- ▶ Assistance and training in performing activities such as dressing, cooking, and eating.

## Ice and Cold Packs

You can use any of these items to “ice” an area:

- ▶ A **cold pack** you buy at the drugstore or grocery store.
- ▶ A **homemade cold pack**. Seal 1 pint of rubbing alcohol and 3 pints of water in a 1-gallon, heavy-duty, plastic freezer bag. Seal that bag inside a second bag. Mark it “Cold pack: Do not eat,” and store it in the freezer.
- ▶ A **bag of frozen vegetables**. Peas or corn work well. You can reuse the bag several times.
- ▶ An **ice towel**. Wet a towel with cold water, and squeeze it until it is just damp. Fold the towel, place it in a plastic bag, and freeze it for 15 minutes. Take the towel out of the bag.
- ▶ An **ice pack**. Put about a pound of ice in a plastic bag. Add water to barely cover the ice. Squeeze the air out of the bag and seal it. Wrap the bag in a damp towel.



- ▶ Physical exercises to increase good posture and joint motion, as well as overall strength and flexibility. For example, people with hand and wrist stiffness may be taught to exercise those joints right after doing the dishes, while the joints are warm and looser.
- ▶ Evaluation of your daily living needs and assessment of your home and work environments, with recommendations for changes in those environments that will help you continue your activities.
- ▶ Assessment and training in the use of assistive devices.
- ▶ Fitting splints for the hands.

## Alternative therapies

Many people use some form of complementary or alternative medicine to help relieve their arthritis symptoms. For example, they might use capsaicin cream, acupuncture, or dietary supplements like glucosamine and chondroitin.

Be sure to tell your doctor if you're using a complementary or alternative therapy or if you're thinking about trying one. He or she can discuss the pros and cons of these treatments and whether any of these treatments may interfere with your standard care. For example, some diet supplements and herbal medicines

may cause problems if you take them with another medicine.

## Surgery

If you have severe pain and loss of function because of arthritis, and if other treatments do not help enough, you may think about having surgery to replace the joint. This is most often done on hips or knees. It can also be done on shoulders.

Replacing the joint can mean less pain and better ability to use the joint. But it does not mean that the joint will be the same as it was before you developed arthritis.

Here are a few other things to think about:

- ▶ Having a joint replaced is almost never urgent. You have plenty of time to learn more about it and decide whether it's right for you.
- ▶ After surgery, it will take several months of rehab and physical therapy to get the best use of your new joint.
- ▶ You are likely to get better results if you are in good shape when you have the surgery. It's important to be active and stay at a healthy weight both before and after the surgery.
- ▶ Replacement joints do not last forever. You may need to replace the joint again in 10 to 20 years.



There are many things to consider if you're thinking about having joint replacement surgery.

- ▶ For help deciding about **knee replacement**, go to \_\_\_\_.
- ▶ For help deciding about **hip replacement**, go to \_\_\_\_.
- ▶ For help deciding about **shoulder replacement**, go to \_\_\_\_.





# Get Active

Exercise is one of the best things you can do to help prevent arthritis from getting worse. It can help keep your muscles strong and reduce joint pain and stiffness. And it can help you reach and stay at a healthy weight.

Before you get started, ask your doctor what kind of activity would be good for you.

These tips can help you exercise safely:

- ▶ **Pace yourself**, especially if you haven't exercised for a while. Start slowly, and don't push yourself too hard.
- ▶ **Use pain medicine** before or after exercise as suggested by your doctor.
- ▶ **Ice the joints** that hurt after you're done exercising.
- ▶ **Rest your joints** if they are swollen. For example, if your knees are swollen, don't use the stairs for a few days. Walk

a shorter distance, and switch to swimming or riding an indoor bike.

If you have joint pain that lasts for more than a day after you exercise, you need to:

- ▶ **Rest the joint** until your pain gets back to the level that is normal for you.
- ▶ **Exercise for less time** or with less effort.
- ▶ **Try another exercise** that doesn't cause pain.

## What type of exercise is best?

In general, swimming, water aerobics, biking, and walking are great ways to be active. They do not irritate your joints as much as some other exercises.

Try some stretching every day. Put each of your joints through its full range of motion once or twice each day.



If you're not sure how to get started **being more active**, go to \_\_\_ for examples of safe exercises and other tips.



# Exercises for Arthritis in the Hand

Below are exercises that you can do to help stretch and strengthen the muscles in your hands and fingers and reduce pain and stiffness. Before you try any of these exercises, talk to your doctor or physical therapist. He or she can help design an exercise plan that is best for you.

Do these exercises until you feel a mild stretch. Never push to a strong stretch. If you feel pain when you do these exercises, stop.

## Tendon glides



1. With one hand, point your fingers and thumb straight up.
2. Then, curl your fingers so that the top two joints in them are bent, and your fingers wrap down. Your fingertips should touch or be near the base of your fingers. Your fingers will look like a hook.
3. Next, make a fist by bending your knuckles.
4. Then, unwind your fingers slightly so that your fingertips can touch the base of your palm.
5. Move back to the starting position, with your fingers and thumb pointing up.
6. Repeat the series of motions 8 to 12 times.
7. Switch hands and repeat steps 1 through 6.

## Finger opposition



1. With one hand, point your fingers and thumb straight up.
2. Then, touch your thumb to each finger, one finger at a time. This will look like an "Okay" sign, but try to keep your other fingers straight and pointing upward as much as you can.
3. Repeat 8 to 12 times.
4. Switch hands and repeat steps 1 through 3.

## Intrinsic flexion



1. Rest one hand on a table, and bend the large joints where your fingers connect to your hand. Keep your thumb and the other joints in your fingers straight.
2. Slowly straighten your fingers. Your wrist should be relaxed, following the line of your fingers and thumb.
3. Move back to your starting position, with your hand bent.
4. Repeat 8 to 12 times.
5. Switch hands and repeat steps 1 through 4.

# Exercises for Arthritis of the Knee

Below are some exercises that you can do to help stretch and strengthen your leg muscles and reduce knee pain and stiffness. Before you try any of these exercises, talk to your doctor or physical therapist. He or she can help design an exercise plan that is best for you.

If you feel pain when you do these exercises, stop.

## Quad sets



1. Sit with one leg straight and supported on the floor or a firm bed. Place a small, rolled-up towel under your knee. Your other leg should be bent, with that foot flat on the floor.
2. Tighten the thigh muscles of your straight leg by pressing the back of your knee down into the towel.
3. Hold for about 6 seconds, then rest for up to 10 seconds.
4. Repeat 8 to 12 times.
5. Switch legs and repeat steps 1 through 4.

## Straight-leg raises to the front



1. Lie on your back with one knee bent so that your foot rests flat on the floor. Your other leg should be straight. Make sure that your low back has a normal curve. You should be able to slip your hand in between the floor and the small of your back, with your palm touching the floor and your back touching the back of your hand.
2. Tighten the thigh muscles in your straight leg by pressing the back of your knee flat down to the floor. Hold your knee straight.
3. Keeping the thigh muscles tight and your leg straight, lift your leg up so that your heel is about 12 inches off the floor. Hold for about 6 seconds, then lower slowly.
4. Relax for up to 10 seconds between repetitions.
5. Repeat 8 to 12 times.
6. Switch legs and repeat steps 1 through 5.

## Active knee flexion



1. Lie on your stomach with your knees straight. If your kneecap is uncomfortable, roll up a washcloth and put it under the leg that you're exercising just above the kneecap.
2. Bend one knee so that you bring your foot up toward your buttocks. If this motion hurts, try it without bending your knee quite as far. This may help you avoid any painful motion.
3. Slowly move your leg up and down.
4. Repeat 8 to 12 times.
5. Switch legs and repeat steps 1 through 4.





# Helpful Tips and Tools

The pain and stiffness from arthritis may make it hard for you to do your daily tasks.

You may feel tired and frustrated. But there are some tools you can use and changes you can make in your home and work area that can help you move more easily and with less pain.

## Use helpful tools at home

- ▶ **Use doorknob covers** to make opening doors easier. Or replace round doorknobs with handles that have a lever so you don't have to use a whole grip to twist the doorknob open. You can just push down on the handle with your hand or even your elbow. This takes the strain off of your wrist and fingers.
- ▶ **Use a reacher** to pick up things off the floor or grab items that are high up in cabinets or closets.
- ▶ **Use padded or large-handled tools** to make objects such as keys, silverware, kitchen pots and pans, combs, and toothbrushes easier to hold.
- ▶ **Use electric tools**, such as can openers, blenders, and power tools, to make it easier to open cans, mix things, or do home repairs.
- ▶ **Use higher chairs or seat cushions** to avoid sitting in chairs that are very low and hard to get in and out of.
- ▶ **Put a raised seat on your toilet** to make it easier to sit down and stand up.



- ▶ **Put grab bars** in your bathroom to help you get in and out of the shower or tub. And put no-slip tape in the bathtub. All of these things can also help prevent falls.
- ▶ **Use a tall stool** for tasks that you would normally do standing up, such as working in the kitchen or wood shop.
- ▶ **Use buttonhooks**, long-handled shoehorns, and sock pullers to make getting dressed easier. And use Velcro instead of small buttons or snaps on your clothes.

You can find some of these devices and tools online, in medical supply stores and catalogs, and in local retail and home improvement stores.

## Modify your work area

- ▶ **Use carts or carriers with wheels** to move objects such as heavy boxes or furniture. If you can't use these items all the time, learn to lift an object safely. Be sure to keep the object close to you as you lift it. Bend your knees and keep your back straight as you grasp the object, then straighten your knees to lift it up.
- ▶ **Use an adjustable chair** that supports your lower back and lets you adjust the height so your feet rest flat on the floor.
- ▶ **Use a computer keyboard tray** that is big enough to hold your keyboard and mouse. And be sure the height of the tray can be adjusted to a spot that allows you to type with no pain.

- ▶ **Use a computer trackball mouse or touch pad** instead of a standard computer mouse to reduce strain on your hand, wrist, and shoulder.
- ▶ **Adjust your computer monitor** so that the top of the screen is at about eye level to reduce strain on your neck.
- ▶ **Arrange your desk or work area** so that the things you use the most are easy to reach and you don't have to lean, bend, or twist to get them.
- ▶ **Sit up straight** to do your work, and take the stress off your back. Relax your shoulders, keep your feet flat on the floor, and don't lean forward too much.
- ▶ **Take breaks** to stretch or get out of your chair. This can help keep your muscles loose and your joints moving well.

An occupational therapist can help you make these and other changes to your home and work area.

## Try a walking aid

A walking aid—a walker or cane—helps substitute for a decrease in strength, range of motion, joint stability, coordination, or endurance. It can also decrease the stress on a painful joint or limb. Using a walking aid can help you be more safe and independent in your daily activities.



Walking aids can help take the stress and weight off of the joints that hurt and make it easier for you to walk.

- ▶ To learn **how to use a cane** safely, go to \_\_\_\_\_.
- ▶ To learn **how to use a walker** safely, go to \_\_\_\_\_.





# Manage Your Weight

If you're overweight, losing weight may be one of the best things you can do for your arthritis. It helps take some of the stress off of your joints.

If you want to get to a healthy weight and stay there, lifestyle changes will work better than dieting.

Here are the three steps to reaching a healthy weight:

- ▶ **Improve your eating habits.** Do it slowly. You may be tempted to do a diet overhaul and change everything about the way you eat. But you will be more successful at staying with the changes you make if you pick just one eating habit at a time to work on.

- ▶ **Get moving.** Try to make physical activity a regular part of your day, just like brushing your teeth. Start small, and build up over time. Moderate activity is safe for most people, but it's always a good idea to talk to your doctor before you start an exercise program.

- ▶ **Change your thinking.** Our thoughts have a lot to do with how we feel and what we do. If you can stop your brain from telling you discouraging things and have it start encouraging you instead, you may be surprised at how much healthier you'll be—in mind and body.



Want to reach a healthier weight? Go to \_\_\_\_\_ for tips on how to get started.

## Did You Know?

When even a small amount of weight loss is combined with exercise, it often works better to reduce pain and get the joint working better again than if only weight loss or exercise is done.





# Coping and Support

Living with arthritis can be stressful. At times you may feel overwhelmed, tired, and angry. And you may worry about what your life may be like as your condition gets worse. These feelings are normal. But there are a lot of ways to cope with arthritis.

## Ways to cope

Even with pain, the good news is that you can do some simple things to feel better and keep the joy in your life and relationships.

- ▶ **Ask your family and friends for help.** Don't be afraid to let people help you with some of your tasks, especially on days when you have a lot of pain.
- ▶ **Balance activity with rest.** If you get tired when you do a task, break the task down into smaller tasks, and rest between them.
- ▶ **Learn ways to reduce stress.** Stress can make your pain feel

worse. You might try deep breathing and relaxation exercises or meditation to help reduce stress and relax your mind and muscles.

- ▶ **Meet with friends.** At times, you may not want to go out because you're too tired or don't want to be seen using a cane or wheelchair. But being social can help you feel better. If you isolate yourself, you may get depressed.
- ▶ **See a counselor.** Cognitive-behavioral therapy allows you to express your fears and concerns and learn new ways of coping with arthritis.
- ▶ **Be creative.** Find ways to still do the things that you enjoy, but do them in a different way that doesn't cause pain. For example, plant flowers in a raised garden bed instead of planting them directly into the ground. Then you won't have to kneel.



- ▶ **Join a support group.** This is a great place to share your concerns and hear how other people cope with the challenges of arthritis. Online forums and chat groups are also good places to find support.
- ▶ **Educate yourself.** The more you know about arthritis, the more you'll be able to cope with any lifestyle changes that you may need to make as your symptoms get worse. Encourage your family and friends to learn about arthritis too. Then they can know what you're dealing with and learn ways they can help you.

### At work

If your arthritis makes it hard for you to do your job, talk to your boss about what changes you can make to your schedule and things you can do to modify your work area.

You might ask if:

- ▶ You can have a later start time.

- ▶ You can work part-time or work from home.
- ▶ You can switch to a light-duty position, if your job involves a lot of lifting, bending, or standing.

### Stay positive

Adopting a "good-health attitude" and healthy habits, such as eating a balanced diet, staying at a healthy weight, and getting enough sleep, will make you feel better and help you stay active.

When you think in a positive way, you may be more able to:

- ▶ Care for yourself and handle the challenges of arthritis.
- ▶ Avoid or cope with stress, anxiety, and depression.

### Keep a pain diary

A pain diary may help you and your doctor find out what makes your pain better or worse. Use the diary and pain scale on this page to keep track of when you have pain, how bad it is, and what you are doing to treat it.

## Did You Know?

Studies have shown that people who are part of a support group and who take an education course, such as an arthritis management course from the Arthritis Foundation, have less pain and depression and are more mobile.



PAIN SCALE										
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
No pain	Mild			Moderate			Severe		Worst pain imaginable	
Daily Diary										
Date, time:										
Pain scale rating:										
Medicine and dose:										
Medicine side effects:										
What made the pain better today?										
What made the pain worse today?										



# Bev's Story



Bev isn't letting the pain of arthritis in her hands and back keep her from doing her favorite activity—gardening. Nor does she let it keep her from doing anything else in her life.

She has found ways to help reduce the pain. For instance, Bev now plants her flowers and vegetables in flowerpots or raised garden beds instead of planting them directly in the ground. It's easier this way, because she doesn't have to bend down too low to care for them, and it doesn't take as much effort to plant them. She also uses tools that have large, curved handles instead of thin, straight handles. Tools shaped like these help to take the pressure off of her back and the joints in her hands.

In the kitchen, she has replaced most of her eating and cooking utensils with “things that have a big, fat rubber handle.” That has made a big difference, she says, because the smaller the handle, the harder it is to grip it. And a bigger handle is less painful to use.

She has also replaced most of the outside

doorknobs to her house with handles that have a lever. Doorknobs, she says, are harder to open and can really hurt her hand and wrist when she tries to turn them.

Bev has been able to keep her pain under control with over-the-counter pain medicine, supplements, massage, and acupuncture.

But massage and acupuncture seem to help her the most. Each month, Bev gets a massage to loosen up and soften her tense muscles and then has tiny needles placed at certain points on her body to help relieve her pain. “After I have a massage and acupuncture, I feel like a new person.

“I encourage people to find out what treatments others have tried and what things have worked for them,” she says. “Obviously, what works for one person may not work for another, but unless you try it, you'll never know if it'll help.”

Bev also encourages people to stay active, keep in touch with family and friends, and ask for help when they need it.

*Bev's story reflects her experiences as told in an interview.*





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