

Hope & Healing

Arthritis Breaking Free from Arthritis

A heart at peace gives life to the body — Proverbs 14:30

Introduction _____

Half of all people age 65 or older have osteo-arthritis. This form of arthritis is also called degenerative joint disease, and is the most common type of arthritis in older people.

Arthritis causes pain and loss of movement. It can range from a mild problem with only occasional stiffness and joint pain, to a serious condition with enough pain to severely limit your life. There is much, however, that you can do to maintain your body's flexibility and movement.

The World of Arthritis _____

When we are younger, the bones of our knee joints are kept from grating on each other because they are seated in cartilage sockets that are encased in a sac of oily fluid. The fluid provides the lubrication when we bend our knees.

As we grow older, our active lives cause the cartilage in our bones to wear thin, just like the brake lining on your car. As the cartilage thins, the bony surfaces come closer together, until they grate on each other. Bits of cartilage break off and float in the fluid surrounding the joint. These cartilage bits are irritating and can cause swelling, and if large enough, can cause a knee joint to lock.

Detecting Arthritis _____

Not all joint pain is arthritis, but if you have pain in your joints similar to what is described below, it may be a sign that arthritis is developing.

1. A joint has been painful for more than

a month.

2. A joint is painful for a few weeks and then stiffens.
3. A joint becomes hot or swollen,
4. A joint makes popping or grinding noises.
5. Small knots appear at the sides of the end joints of the fingers.

Advanced Osteoarthritis _____

Advanced arthritis affects different joints of the body in different ways. Below are descriptions of what can be expected for particular joints if arthritis continues to advanced stages.

The Hands - The knobby enlargements that can develop at the end finger joints can cause our hands to look old. They may also cause stiffness, but most people go about their daily lives with only mild limitations as a result of arthritis in their hands.

The Spine - We are put together well enough to weather the early effects of spine arthritis without severe limitations. As time passes the bony spurs that develop cause more pain and stiffness, and the disks between our vertebrae begin to wear. Thinned out discs then become another cause of stiff and painful backs.

The Hips and Knees - Usually hips and knees become involved together. Pain develops slowly and comes and goes for years before limitations are experienced. Then, a knee swells, or begins to wobble. Walking causes pain.

An x-ray or bone scan may be ordered to check the damage. If the knee is swollen, the doctor may remove fluid through a needle, and put a cortisone shot into the joint. An

orthopedist may be asked by your doctor to determine the extent of damage.

The Outlook for Arthritis Sufferers

Although the above descriptions sound somewhat discouraging, the future of most arthritis sufferers is actually very good. The pain and stiffness will follow a peak and valley pattern. The trick is to level out the course of the disease through time, by exercise, weight control, drug therapy and an optimistic attitude.

Breaking Free of Arthritis _____

To break free of arthritis suffering, you must develop a plan to treat your joints in such a way that you get the best service from them.

Strategy #1 — Exercise

Exercise is basic to the treatment of osteoarthritis. Certain activities, such as a daily period to "be good to my joints" can be done in a swimming pool, a walk, or a ride on a bicycle. Choose an exercise that you enjoy and that gives you a consistent level of intensity. The goals of exercise are:

1. Improve movement through daily stretching.
2. Develop stronger muscles to strengthen joint stability.
3. Improve overall fitness.

There are basically three types of exercises that you can use to achieve the goals listed above.

1. **Stretching Exercises:** these limber up muscles and increase flexibility.
2. **Strength Exercises:** these tone muscles that support your joints, making them more stable.
3. **Aerobic Exercises:** these improve overall fitness by strengthening your heart and lungs. Swimming, particularly in a heated pool, is excellent because the water supports your body as you take your joints through their range of motion. Walking is another alternative. As a general rule exercises such as tennis, aerobic dance, or running should be avoided since they can overload sore joints.

General Rules of Exercise

Exercise, of course, must be individualized, depending on which of your joints are involved and how much they hurt. Your doctor will help you develop an exercise program that considers your most painful joints and your overall fitness. Here are some general rules:

1. **Start gradually and never overdo it.** If you have severe pain or discomfort, stop that particular exercise. Cut back if need be, but don't give up.
2. **Always warm up first.** Walk 1/4 mile to warm up. Then, do gentle stretching. A gentle massage of stiff joints or heat from an infrared lamp or a warm bath may also help get the blood moving before you do the walking.
3. **Repeat stretching and strength exercises daily.** Begin with three repetitions of each exercise. Over the course of several weeks work up to ten repetitions, or as many as your doctor advises.

Strategy #2 — Drug Therapy

Most arthritis drugs are non-steroidal, anti-inflammatory drugs. Some are available without prescription, but most

are prescription drugs. Studies show that Acetaminophen (Tylenol) may be as effective as prescription drugs.

Side Effects of Arthritis Drugs

There are many drugs for arthritis, making it difficult to keep track of. But, they all work about the same way, and they all can cause stomach pains, liver trouble, and kidney problems.

The stomach trouble can be as simple as a mild heartburn, or it can be as severe as an ulcer that bleeds. Be on the lookout for dark stools or blood in the stool. To reduce the risk of stomach trouble, take the medication with a full glass of water, with milk, with food or with a dose of antacid.

Strategy #3 — Capsaicin and Zotrix Cream

These creams relieve pain and makes joint movement easier. Combined with hot baths and exercise, arthritis suffering can now be reduced to a level where arthritis drugs may not be needed as a daily medicine.

What About Surgery _____

Time is on your side if you are advised to consider surgery to relieve the pain of arthritis. It is not something that you need to rush into. But you will more likely choose to have an artificial joint inserted, if you experience any of the following:

- Night pain in the hip or knee.
- You have to quit work because of arthritis.
- Medicines don't relieve your pain.
- Misery because of pain.
- Climbing stairs is difficult.
- Getting into a car is difficult.
- You can't drive because of pain.

Summary _____

Don't get discouraged if your doctor has you try different treatments. The best combination of drugs, rest, and exercise is different for every person.

Awaken the Miracles Within You

The Miracle of Cause and Effect

Whatever we experience in life is the true picture of our thoughts and our beliefs.

We can change our thoughts and beliefs. When we do this, our picture on the outside changes too. The outer picture can't change, however, unless our thoughts change. Our heartfelt convictions are what we show as our true self, not our pious opinions or our wishing to appear agreeable by always agreeing.

Convictions can't be adopted on a whim, however, we get them by thinking certain thoughts and by entertaining certain feelings as we go through life day by day.

So, our habits of thought weave the pattern of our destiny, which is as it should be. Remember, no one else can keep you out of the Kingdom of God, or put you into it either.

The recommendations and information in this handout are appropriate in most cases. However, for specific information concerning your personal medical condition, please, consult your doctor.