

Take Charge of Your Joints

Tips for Living with Arthritis



a wellness publication written by
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and attitude, and increase your energy level. Moderate exercise will reduce further joint damage by keeping the muscles around the joints strong and elastic. Work at getting at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity three or more days a week.

- Break activities down into smaller tasks that you can manage.
- Keep a daily diary of pain and mood changes and share it with your doctor.
- Use assistive devices (such as cane, walker, splints or braces to support weakened joints) when needed.
- Use the palms of your hands instead of your fingers.
- Use extra thick pens and larger-handled cooking utensils.

□ Learn all you can about your arthritis care and treatment

- Attend educational programs in your county conducted by your local Arthritis Foundation and University of Tennessee Extension, such as *Tai Chi*, *Arthritis Self-Help Program* and *Arthritis Foundation Exercise Program*.
- Join an arthritis support group.
- Ask for a referral to a rheumatologist (medical specialist in arthritis treatment).
- Read about arthritis at the library or on the Internet.

- Contact your local Arthritis Foundation for books and other resources.

□ Keep a positive attitude

- Arthritis can make you feel angry, sad, resentful, irritable, helpless, frustrated or afraid. Share these negative feelings with your doctor.
- By learning all you can and using the above self-care tips, you can control your arthritis in a positive way.
- For more information about arthritis or the arthritis education program available in your area, visit the Arthritis Foundation Web site at <http://www.Arthritis.org> and the University of Tennessee Extension Web site at <http://fcs.tennessee.edu/healthsafety/index.htm>

For programs and publications on health, contact:

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 Programs in agriculture and natural resources, 4-H youth development, family and consumer sciences, and resource development. University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture and county governments cooperating. UT Extension provides equal opportunities in programs and employment.

One in three adults has some form of arthritis. You can protect your joints by learning these self-care skills.

(✓) Check those self-care actions you plan to try to control your arthritis.

□ Know what arthritis is

There are many forms of arthritis.

- *Osteoarthritis* (breakdown of the cushioning tissue, called cartilage, in the joints) is the most common form. It affects the weight-bearing joints of the knees, hips and lower back as well as the hands.
- *Fibromyalgia* is a pain syndrome involving muscles and muscle attachment areas.
- *Gout* is a rheumatic disease causing sudden, severe episodes of pain and tenderness, redness, warmth and swelling in the joints.
- *Juvenile Rheumatoid Arthritis* produces serious complications in severe cases or causes few problems in very mild cases.
- *Lupus* affects the skin and body tissues and possibly organs such as kidneys, lungs or heart.
- *Rheumatoid Arthritis* causes inflammation (swelling) of the lining of joint tissue, leading to deformity.

□ Know the warning signs of arthritis

If you have any of the following symptoms, see your doctor:

- Swelling in one or more joints.
- Morning stiffness lasting 30 minutes or longer.
- Persistent joint pain or tenderness.
- Inability to move a joint in the normal way.
- Redness or warmth in a joint.
- Weight loss, fever or weakness, and joint pain that cannot be explained.

□ Find out from your doctor which type of arthritis you have

Your doctor will take a detailed medical history of your current and past symptoms and conduct a physical examination, x-rays and blood work to determine the type of arthritis you have.



□ Talk to your doctor about treatment options

- Medications can reduce pain and tenderness in the joints.
- Physical therapy can teach you new ways to perform daily activities such as dressing, walking, climbing stairs and bathing.
- Heat and cold therapies may ease pain and stiffness by relaxing the muscles.
- A physical therapist, occupational therapist, exercise physiologist or doctor can recommend an exercise program for you.
- Lose weight if overweight. Extra weight puts more pressure on the joints and can aggravate some forms of arthritis.
- In some cases, surgery may be necessary to repair damaged joints.

□ Use a variety of methods to control your arthritis pain

- Get adequate sleep each night.
- Balance physical activity with rest.
- Take medications (prescribed or over-the-counter) as recommended by your doctor.
- Exercise to keep joints moving, reduce pain and stiffness, improve your mood