

WHAT IS “ARTHRITIS”?

“ARTHRITIS” literally means “**joint inflammation**”

- **Types of Arthritis:**
 - Osteoarthritis
 - Rheumatoid Arthritis
 - Other related conditions include: Fibromyalgia, Gout, Lupus (Systemic Lupus Erythematosus), Ankylosing Spondylitis, and Mixed-Connective Tissue Disease, among others.

- **OSTEOARTHRITIS**
 - A degenerative disease of the cartilage and bone
 - Results in pain and stiffness of the affected joint
 - Caused by repetitive “wear and tear” over time
 - Can also be triggered by a traumatic injury
 - Responds well to conservative treatment
 - Surgery used as a last resort

- **RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS**
 - A systemic disease: in addition to the joints, RA can also affect internal organs including the lungs, heart and blood vessels.
 - Characterized by joint inflammation and pain
 - Cause is unknown however thought to be associated with genetics and an abnormal immune response.
 - Management includes a multi-disciplinary team of health care professionals including Physical and Occupational Therapy, anti-rheumatic drugs to influence the course of the disease and anti-inflammatory drugs to control the symptoms

HOW CAN I MANAGE MY ARTHRITIS?

There is no cure for arthritis. However there are many things you can do to make living with arthritis easier and less painful.

- ❖ Physical Therapists emphasize that **exercise** for strength, flexibility and range of motion **is the cornerstone of successful arthritis management**. The goals of physical therapy in treating arthritis are to reduce pain, to help restore mobility, function, strength and flexibility and to prevent unnecessary disability.
- ❖ Occupational Therapists can help you to learn **self-management skills**: how to cope with arthritis in your day-to-day life. Pacing yourself and conserving your energy are also significant concepts in self-management. In addition to giving you a practical strategy for living with arthritis, self-management also yields a sense of confidence, empowerment and hope.
- ❖ Consult with your **physician** regarding appropriate medications for pain relief.
- ❖ Consult with your physician regarding weight control. Excessive weight puts stress on joints.

For more information contact:

Am Physical Therapy Assoc www.apta.org
800-999-2782

Am Occupational Therapy Assoc www.aota.org
800-729-2682

The Arthritis Foundation: www.arthritis.org
800-283-7800

PROTECTING YOUR JOINTS JOINT CONSERVATION TECHNIQUES

Protecting your joints is one of the most effective ways to avoid or relieve pain and prevent further damage to the joint. Techniques that have been devised to protect the joints during everyday activities include:

- Avoid making a tight fist.
 - ✓ Use built-up handles on tools, utensils, cooking utensils, hair and toothbrushes, and pens to decrease pressure on the joints in your hand.
 - ✓ Wrap foam, cloth or tape around the handles of objects, such as knives and cooking pots and pans to cushion the grip.
 - ✓ Household and gardening tools with larger, ergonomically designed handles are now available for sale in many retail outlets.

- Avoid twisting the fingers and hands.
 - ✓ Avoid positions that push your other fingers toward your little finger. Finger motions should be in the direction of your thumb whenever possible.
 - ✓ Use a jar opener to avoid twisting the fingers and hands. Use the palms of your hands to open jars or consider installing an electric jar opener.
 - ✓ Replace round doorknobs and faucet handles with lever-style handles.

- Avoid pinching items between your thumb and fingers.
 - ✓ Hold a book, plate or mug in the palms of your hands.
 - ✓ Consider using a book stand.
 - ✓ Consider switching from a clutch purse to a shoulder bag.

PROTECTING YOUR JOINTS

JOINT CONSERVATION TECHNIQUES

- Use the strongest joint to complete an activity. If you have pain or stiffness in your fingers, hands or wrist, try putting cloth loops or straps on dresser drawers and closet doors. Slip your forearm through the loop and pull the drawer or door handles to open them. When you are ready to close the drawer use your hips instead of your hands.
- Simplify dressing by choosing clothing that is easy to put on. Consider looser clothing to give you extra room when putting them on and off. Simplify dressing by choosing clothing with elastic waists and shoes with Velcro closures. Look for clothing that fastens in the front, preferably with Velcro closures or zippers with big ring pulls. Ask your Occupational Therapist about adaptive equipment that is available to making dressing an easier and less painful experience.
- Avoid lifting heavy objects by using carts or carriers with wheels to move suitcases, garbage cans, and grocery bags.
- Pace yourself. Separate daily tasks, including leisure activities into manageable amounts and take breaks when necessary.

THE FACTS ABOUT ARTHRITIS

- “Arthritis” refers to more than 100 different diseases that affect areas in or around joints
- According to the Arthritis Foundation, the number of Americans with arthritis or chronic joint symptoms: 2005-66 million (1 in 3 adults)
- Half of those Americans with arthritis don’t think anything can be done to help them.
- Arthritis strikes women (approx 65%) more than men (approx 35%)
- Costs to the US economy totals more than \$86.2 billion annually

Arthritis-related conditions can be grouped into 2 categories:

- Localized:
 - Affects a single joint
 - Affects the tissue surrounding the joints or bones directly
 - Localized arthritis can affect more than one joint at a time; however the cause is localized not generalized/systemic.
 - Osteoarthritis: a localized, degenerative joint disease in which the cartilage that covers the ends of bones in the joint deteriorates, causing pain and loss of movement as bone begins to rub against the bone. Osteoarthritis is the most prevalent form of arthritis.
- Generalized:
 - Subgroup A:
 - Widespread muscle and soft tissue discomfort in which there is NO evidence of swelling or inflammation.
 - Fibromyalgia: widespread pain resulting from the muscles and tendons attaching to the bone. Fibromyalgia affects mostly women.
 - Subgroup B:
 - Conditions in which inflammation affects the entire body: muscles, joints, bones, skin, kidneys, heart and lungs. Includes rheumatoid arthritis, gout, lupus, as well as ankylosing spondylitis, scleroderma and juvenile arthritis.
 - Rheumatoid arthritis: an autoimmune disease in which the joint lining becomes inflamed as part of the body’s immune system activity. Rheumatoid arthritis is one of the most serious and disabling types, affecting mostly women.
 - Gout: Affects mostly men. Is usually the result of a defect in body chemistry. This painful condition most often attacks small joints, especially the big toe. Gout almost always can be completely controlled with medication and changes in diet.
 - Systemic lupus erythematosus (lupus): a serious disorder that can inflame and damage joints and other connective tissue throughout the body.

THE FACTS ABOUT ARTHRITIS

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Treatments:

- Conservative treatment includes physical and occupational therapy:
 - Instruction on self-management techniques, including joint conservation, pacing, and adaption of activities of daily living
 - Advise what exercises can relieve the pain of arthritis and which activities should be avoided.
 - Evaluate the home or workplace and suggest changes and modifications to your environment that will make arthritis easier to live with and put less stress on your joints.
 - Design adaptive equipment or recommend assistive devices to help function better in daily activities.
 - Make custom splints to rest or support limbs.

- Physicians may offer new medications and other medical treatments, such as anti-rheumatic drugs to influence the course of the disease and/or anti-inflammatory drugs to control the symptoms.

- More aggressive treatment includes surgery, and is often an option for people with osteoarthritis