



# LIVING WITH Arthritis

Osteoarthritis,  
rheumatoid arthritis:  
Know the difference  
for better living

*By Brian Sodoma*

**A**pproximately 350 million people around the world have some form of arthritis. Osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis are the two most common forms, and both bring unique and potentially debilitating impacts to daily life. Understanding the differences between them is key to managing your symptoms and seeking additional treatment.

### **Key differences**

Osteoarthritis involves the “wearing down” of cartilage on the edge of bones inside joints. Once that cartilage wears down completely, bones start rubbing against one another, producing pain.

Osteoarthritis most commonly affects the hands, knees, spine and hips. Some level of osteoarthritis eventually impacts almost everyone because of daily

living, said Ralph Bennett, MD, co-founder of Arizona Arthritis & Rheumatology Associates. But for some, the cartilage may not completely deteriorate, so they may not require extensive treatment.

Rheumatoid arthritis, on the other hand, is a systemic disease where the immune system attacks an area of the body. In the case of this type of arthritis, it attacks joints.

"It's actually known as rheumatoid disease because it can affect other organs and systems, too," Dr. Bennett added.

### Symptoms, diagnosis

Both types of arthritis present themselves as joint inflammation. However, rheumatoid arthritis tends to involve particular joints. For example, in the hand, rheumatoid arthritis commonly produces swelling in the larger bones closer to the palm. Osteoarthritis is commonly associated with the bones closer to the fingertips. Rheumatoid arthritis may also be accompanied by low-grade fevers and fatigue.

A physical exam and blood report revealing elevated inflammation markers help to diagnose rheumatoid arthritis. At the same time, half of the new cases of rheumatoid arthritis do not have markers for this disease, Dr. Bennett added. In these cases, if physical symptoms align with a rheumatoid diagnosis, your doctor may suggest treatment. If there is a response to treatment, a formal rheumatoid arthritis diagnosis may follow.

### Treatment

Pain relievers are the first line of treatment for both conditions. Some osteoarthritis sufferers with extreme pain may need joint replacement.

For rheumatoid arthritis sufferers, the steroid Prednisone has been a long-time option, but it can bring a heightened risk for infections and other side effects. Other biologic agents have become more popular in the past two decades. While there is no cure for rheumatoid arthritis, some of these agents offer considerable relief, Dr.



Bennett said.

"They can help to decrease the activity of the disease. You can see some inflammation markers go down," he noted.

## 3 KEY TIPS

If you have arthritis or are at risk, here are few lifestyle tips to consider:

**1** If you smoke, make an effort to stop. In addition to cancer and other health risks, research links smoking to a peptide that predisposes someone to rheumatoid arthritis.

**2** Maintain a healthy body weight. For every pound of extra weight, Dr. Bennett explained, that's five pounds of added pressure on weight-bearing joints, which can cause arthritis to flare up.



**3** Some rheumatoid arthritis patients may experience moderate benefits from anti-inflammatory eating plans, but they should not be considered a treatment replacement.



# STANDING UP to Knee Pain

Life changes help bring relief *By Joan Westlake*

**O**steoarthritis is a leading source of chronic pain in the U.S. and includes gout, fibromyalgia and rheumatoid arthritis.

To combat pain and arthritis progression, work with your physician for appropriate treatments which can include activity, medications, physical therapy and possibly surgery. Small changes can pay off in the big benefits of alleviating pain and slowing down the progression of arthritis.

## Weight relief

Studies indicate a 10-percent weight loss can cut arthritic knee pain in half, and a 20-percent loss in weight can drop the pain another 25-percent. Even losing one pound can take four pounds of pressure off your knees.

Sarah A. Payne, DO, medical director at Banner Hospice & Palliative Care, said, "It isn't just the weight load that is destructive. The fat cells themselves release an inflammatory substance that can destroy the joints. destroy the joints."

## Activity relief

Joint-friendly physical activity such as walking, biking, Tai Chi and swimming have shown to help relieve arthritis pain, and improve function, mood, and quality of life. Payne acknowledges that healing yourself isn't easy.

When it hurts to move, it can become a vicious cycle where symptoms of inactivity like pain and instability impede movement.

## Nutrition relief

Banner Health Registered Dietitian Margaret O'Brien said what you eat is important not only for weight loss, but also inflammation. The Mediterranean and DASH diets meet her guidelines for reducing inflammation including eliminating sugar, salt, fried foods and highly processed carbohydrates and eating the following:

- omega-3s from fatty fish (salmon and sardines), extra virgin olive oil, avocado, flax and walnuts
- colorful fruits and vegetables
- whole grains
- juices and beverages fortified with vitamin D
- garlic, ginger, turmeric and cumin

## Sleep Relief

"There is a lot of emerging research about the affects of sleep on chronic pain and disease," said O'Brien. "We refer to it as sleep hygiene, which includes habits such as how to power down before you sleep, room temperature, darkness and disruptive screens."

Dr. Payne asserted, "No matter your age or physical condition, never, ever think all hope is lost. At a community event, a woman in her late 60s asked for my help. She was obese and in a wheelchair. I advised that she go to a weight loss center. Four years later, she had lost more than 80 pounds, was walking and said she was pain free. I've seen patients in their 80s achieve significant pain reduction. It's never too late."



# Finding relief from pain

## Natural remedies for arthritis

*By Julie Maurer*

Arthritis can be a very painful disease for some. While there is not a cure, several options to lessen your pain are readily available.

Betty Louton, a clinical pharmacist at Banner Health, said it's important to make sure you take any prescriptions your doctors prescribes first, before trying the latest pain relief methods you may see on TV.

### Set treatment priorities

"It is important to first buy your prescription medications, then if you have money left over, check with your provider before starting any supplements," Louton said.

But once you have taken your prescription for arthritis, there are several other additional

options to help with the pain. According to Louton, the best medicine for arthritis is movement.

"Nothing is going to stop the pain of arthritis altogether — it's a joint disease. The more you move, the less it hurts. But when it hurts to move, then you don't want to. It is a downward spiral" she said.

### Economical options

The first line of defense, Tylenol, along with rotating ice and heat packs on your aching joints. There are also several gels you can use to ease pain be-

fore getting active.

"Creams and gels are usually the easiest and least expensive way to go to get some relief and you can easily switch when something stops working," Louton said.

She added these gels, including IcyHot and Bengay, often use lidocaine and menthol, which act to distract you from your pain. "These are called counter-irritants. They confuse your pain signals because it's an irritant to your body," Louton said.

"And when your body gets used to one type, you just switch to another one."

### Dietary supplements

Glucosamine and Chondroitin are dietary supplements that have been known to relieve some joint pain by helping with the development of additional cartilage in knees, ankles and wrists.

"It can be really expensive, and some people say it doesn't work," Louton said. "If the arthritis is

advanced, then much of time it won't do a whole lot."

As for herbal supplements, Louton urges you to discuss with your physician first, even if you see something promoted online or on television.

"Herbal supplements can have interactions with other medications you're taking. Some of them act against blood thinners. If you have diabetes, several can cause blood sugar levels to spike," Louton said.

### Ask for help

Ultimately, your physician and pharmacist are your best resource for advice on over-the-counter solutions for arthritis pain, Louton noted. There is no need to be on your own when choosing the best option. "Just swing by the pharmacy and talk to them and they will usually come out and show you what's available and help find the best option for your needs," Louton said.

## For life's potential emergencies

Have you ever wondered, is this an emergency? If you aren't sure, or you need a nurse's advice about where to get care, call us. We are here to help. 24 hours a day.

**Banner Health Nurse On-Call: (602) 747-7990 or (888) 747-7990**

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