

# Osteoarthritis & Pain Control

### Q: Is osteoarthritis a common problem for seniors?

**A:** Yes. There are over 100 types of arthritis, but Osteoarthritis (OA) is the most common. It affects more than 27 million Americans---more people than diabetes. Arthritis and rheumatic conditions cost the United States economy \$128 billion annually. The word “arthritis” means “joint inflammation.”

OA is most common in people over age 50, but it can affect younger people who have injured joints, and it’s not a normal part of aging. Damage to a joint can cause pressure and stress when the joint moves, and inflammation in the joint’s tissues.

But OA pain can be managed. Many people will stop moving when they feel the pain---but joints that are not kept active will stiffen, and cause more pain. People may think that physical activity will make their OA worse---but just the opposite is true: NOT moving makes OA worse. Poorly managed pain can lead to depression, loss of sleep and isolation.

The best way to control pain is to stop it from occurring, and prevent it from getting worse. To maintain you health::

- Do daily activities, but pace yourself and use well-timed rest breaks.
- Protect your joints from the stress of daily activities
- Lose weight to ease pressure on your joints. For every 1 pound of weight lost, the load on the knees is cut by 4 pounds.
- Break up repetitive movements with other tasks that use different joints.
- If you get tired, don’t overdue the exercise.
- Get a good night’s sleep.
- Avoid activities which put high strain on joints, like prolonged standing.

- Use your largest and strongest muscles for tasks—like using both arms to carry objects, rather than both hands, and bend at the knees when lifting something from the ground.

Any kind of movement—like walking your dog or working in the garden—will improve the symptoms. People with OA are urged to get at least half an hour of moderate aerobic exercise like walking, swimming or biking, at least 5 days a week. Any amount of activity is good for your joints. Muscle-strengthening exercise is also good 2 or 3 times a week

A new publication called *Put Pain In Its Place* from the Arthritis Foundation and the National Council on Aging provides other tips on the use of over-the-counter pain relievers and anti-inflammatories, as well as use of prescription pain medications. Some anti-depressants and anti-seizure medications are also prescribed because they interrupt pain signals. There are prescription anti-inflammatories in the form of gels and lotions which can be rubbed over sore joints. You should discuss all these pain relievers with your doctor, and be sure to report any side effects or reactions your body has to any medications.

Your doctor may want you to see a specialist, like a physical therapist, who can combine therapy with exercise to reduce pain and improve function. Most people with osteoarthritis will never need joint surgery, but it is an option.

“To take control of your pain, you need to believe that you have the power over pain,” the Arthritis Foundation says, “and commit to using this power each day, so you don’t let pain steal from your life.” For more information about *Put Pain In its Place*, contact the Arthritis Foundation at 1-800-283-7800.

