



Start
Living
Well
with
Arthritis



IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH & WELFARE

Arthritis by the numbers

If you have arthritis, you're not alone. Nearly **70 million** Americans have arthritis, and in Idaho, **36.4%** of adults have one or more of the **120** diseases and conditions that affect joints, surrounding tissues and/or other connective tissues. It's the **#1** cause of disability in the workplace. Although the risk for arthritis increases with age, it's not just an older person's disease. Nearly **3** out of **5** are under the age of **65**. Children get arthritis, too.

Ways you can start living well with arthritis now

On these pages, you'll find simple ideas you can try to help you not only live with arthritis, but also live better. You'll find a few quick fixes for pain, easier ways to do the things you enjoy, and other ideas that can help long-term. Pick one or pick a few. Once you get on the road to managing your arthritis, you may find that the more you can do, the easier it gets; and the easier it gets, the more you can do to start living well with arthritis.

Make your first move

EXERCISE

Want to know one way to relieve arthritis pain? Put one foot in front of the other and repeat. Walking. It's a great way to start.

If the weather's bad or too hot, walk at an indoor mall. Some even have walking clubs.

Your exercise routine should include stretching, range-of-motion exercises, muscle strengthening, and exercises that increase your breathing and heart rate. A physical therapist can help you create a program that is safe and effective for you.

Walk in water. Run in water. Dance in water. Water supports you and allows you to do more with less effort, reducing wear and tear on your joints. Talk to your YMCA or a local gym and take the plunge to better health.

Take the work out of working out. Do exercise that you enjoy. Try country line dancing or ballroom dancing, yoga or tai chi.

Who's your buddy? Get a friend to come along, and you can share the benefits of getting fit.

The Arthritis Foundation has developed exercise classes for people with arthritis for both in water and on land. Check their web site to see if there are classes in your area.

What have you got to lose?

WEIGHT MANAGEMENT/ HEALTHY EATING

How much extra weight are you putting on your knees, hips, feet and back? Giving your joints a lift by taking off weight can do wonders for pain relief. You might also find it gives you more energy to start living well with arthritis.

Mom was right! Eat more vegetables and fruit. Some may help reduce swelling and pain. On the Internet you can check out www.5aday.gov, www.5aday.com or www.aboutproduce.com for information and recipes.

Watch how much you eat, not just what you eat. Start with eating a quarter less than you usually do.

Give a diet a chance to succeed. If you can start feeling the benefits of a diet, you'll be more apt to continue it.

The omega-3 fatty acids found in fish may help some kinds of arthritis. A study showed people with rheumatoid arthritis who ate about 4 ounces of fish a day had less morning stiffness, swollen joints and pain after 6 months.

Eat more citrus fruit. High dietary levels of vitamin C are associated with lower risk of osteoarthritis, so be sure you are eating foods rich in vitamin C.

Doctor doctor, give me the news

MEDICAL

“You have arthritis” is not a diagnosis. There are over 100 different forms of arthritis, each of which has different treatments. Getting the right diagnosis means getting the right treatment.

Make sure you know where it hurts, when it hurts and how it hurts. If you're more sore after certain activities, that's important for you and your doctor to know.

When you visit your doctor, bring a list of all the medications and nutritional supplements you're taking. Knowing what you're taking can prevent side effects and other problems.

Take the right meds at the right time all the time. Sometimes it takes weeks - or even months - for the full benefits to be felt.

Don't change your dosage without talking to your doctor first. If your medications don't seem to be working, don't up the dosage on your own.

Talk to the Doc! There are many new drugs for rheumatoid arthritis, osteoarthritis, and other arthritis-related diseases. If you're not pleased with the results of what you are taking now, ask if one of these newer drugs might be right for you.

Surgery. It's a scary word but surgery may be the best thing for damaged joints and pain relief.

Painless tips to help you feel better

PAIN MANAGEMENT

Arthritis hurts. And when it hurts worse, try listening to your favorite music. It can ease the stress and maybe help you forget the pain. At least for a while.

Some pain relievers that you can buy without a prescription can help. But some people need prescription medication for pain control and to prevent stomach problems. Work with your doctor to find what works best for you.

Creams or rubs with capsiacin may help with temporary pain relief for some kinds of arthritis.

A warm bath before bed can relieve muscle tension, ease aching joints and help you get a good night's sleep.

When joints are hot and inflamed, applying something cold, like a frozen bag of peas, can decrease pain and swelling.

Shoes shaped like a wedge of pizza may look delicious, but they don't help your pain or your disposition. Buy comfortable shoes that don't cramp your feet or your style.

What about alternative therapies? There are no miracle cures for arthritis. Some things work for some people some of the time. Beware of any product that claims they have a cure or are guaranteed to work.

Small changes and big benefits

MODIFYING ACTIVITIES AND ASSISTANCE DEVICES

One way to limit the pain of arthritis is to avoid the things that create more pain, like lifting heavy objects. Use a cart or carrier with wheels or lift with larger muscles and joints.

Want to get a handle on arthritis? Use oversized handles for your kitchenware. Replace round doorknobs with lever-style handles. Use jar openers, long-handled cleaning tools and other assistance tools to ease the strain on your joints.

Arrange your home to make chores easier and less painful. Put things you use often at levels that help you avoid high reaching or deep bending.

Place a pillow on your lap when you read to support the book and your hands.

Talk to your doctor about getting a handicap parking permit and use those spaces on the days you need to limit your walking. Don't worry about what others will think because you don't "look" handicapped. Do what you need to do to take care of you.

An occupational therapist can identify things you are doing at home or at work that make your pain worse. He or she can help you find easier ways to do the things you want and have to do in your daily life.

Taking control of your pain and your life

ATTITUDE AND SUPPORT

Change your mind about arthritis. Your mind plays a very important role in how you feel. Build your life around your wellness instead of the pain; you'll feel better.

Gaining knowledge and becoming educated about your particular chronic disease can help you control fear of the unknown. The more you know, the more you can do something about it.

Arthritis is not a social disease, so keep seeing other people. It's more important than ever to maintain relationships with friends and family.

Even though arthritis can change your life, life is still worth living well. Do the things that bring you joy, even if you have to change the way you do them, and you will live a joyful life.

Encourage your loved ones to learn about your arthritis. Their support and understanding makes living with arthritis much easier.

Give and get hugs. Touch is powerful, whether it comes from another human or a pet.

Laugh. It feels good all over.

Getting in tune with arthritis

LISTEN TO YOUR BODY

If you're tired or tense, find ways to relax. Try deep breathing: sit comfortably and take in several long, slow breaths, breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth.

If what you're doing causes pain, problem solve. Write down exactly what you are doing that is causing the pain and then list ways that you can do something different to relieve the pain. Try some of the ideas and find what works best for you.

If your job involves spending a lot of time sitting or standing in one position, take frequent breaks to stretch stiff joints.

If the pain changes and becomes more severe, or starts to hurt where it hasn't before, tell your doctor.

Pace yourself. Separate daily tasks, including exercise and leisure activities into manageable amounts, and take breaks when necessary.

Some days are worse than others with arthritis. You may need more rest and breaks on those days.

Whether you have a mantra, or favorite calming phrase, or prayer, finding some quiet time each day for meditation can do wonders for your energy and attitude.

There are many other places to find information about living well with arthritis. Here are a few ideas:

The Arthritis Foundation

1-800-444-4993 (In Utah and Idaho)

1-800-283-7800 (National office)

www.arthritis.org

National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Disease

www.nih.gov/niams

The American College of Rheumatology

www.rheumatology.org

If you enjoy searching on the Internet, here are some key words that might give you more tips to start living well with arthritis:

Arthritis and Gardening

Arthritis and Exercise

Arthritis and Physical Therapy

Arthritis and Occupational Therapy

Arthritis and Adaptive Equipment

