

10 steps for

living well

with arthritis



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Medical consultants

Dr Mona Marabani, Rheumatologist and
Arthritis Australia Board Member

Assoc Professor John York, Department of
Rheumatology, Royal Prince Alfred Hospital Sydney

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Arthritis Australia State and Territory health educators

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10 steps for living well with arthritis

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● Living with arthritis

Arthritis is a very common condition in Australia affecting people of all ages and from all walks of life. Its symptoms often have a big impact on the daily lives of people.

Although arthritis can be difficult to live with, there are many simple measures that can help anyone with arthritis manage their symptoms and cope with daily life. They rely on input from a number of people but the most important person is you - the person with arthritis.

This book will put you on the path to managing your arthritis by taking an active role in understanding and treating your condition. In doing this, you will experience less pain and stay more active than those people who feel there is nothing they can do to help themselves.

The key steps listed on this page form a simple-to-follow check list for living well with arthritis. Read the rest of the information in this book to find out more about each of the steps - and good luck on your journey to better living!

step one

TAKE CONTROL BY KNOWING YOUR DISEASE

With arthritis, knowledge is invaluable.

Spend the time to learn more about arthritis, find out what type you have, and then discover the best ways to improve your condition.

Many people say that by learning about their arthritis and what they can do about it gives them back a feeling of control over their lives.

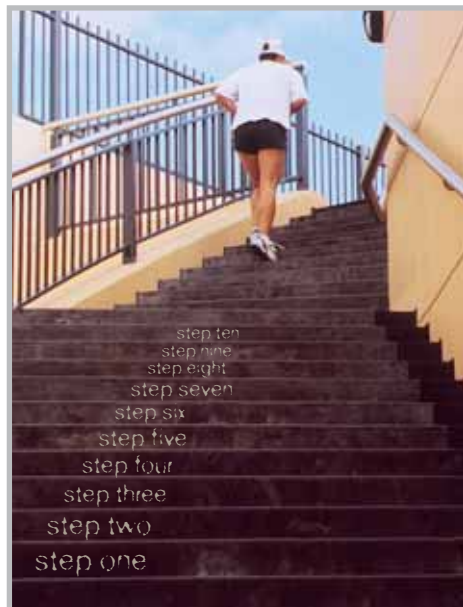
The information on the following pages is a good start to understanding and managing your arthritis but to learn more phone your State or Territory Arthritis Office or visit www.arthritisaustralia.com.au

See page 32 for contact details for your local State or Territory Arthritis Office

● Arthritis - what is it?

Arthritis is not a single disease. The word "arthritis" literally means "inflammation of the joint" and there are more than 100 conditions that can be classified as arthritis. People can be affected in all sorts of different ways but the most common symptoms of arthritis are pain,

“Arthritis literally means inflammation of the joint.”



swelling and stiffness in one or more joints and fatigue. The three most prevalent types are osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis and gout.

Osteoarthritis

Easily the most common form of arthritis is osteoarthritis. It mainly affects people over the age of 45, but it can develop in younger people. Osteoarthritis can affect any joint in the body but it usually occurs in large weight-bearing joints such as hips, knees, shoulders and the lower spine. It can also occur in the hands, particularly at the base of the thumb and the end joints of the fingers.

“...the sooner you talk to your doctor about the symptoms, the better off you will be.”



Osteoarthritis happens when a joint between two bones becomes worn. In a healthy joint, the ends of the bones are covered by a smooth layer of cartilage. The cartilage stops the bones grating together and helps the joint move smoothly. The cartilage also cushions the bones.

In osteoarthritis, the cartilage becomes damaged. This can be the result of:

- an injury or a fracture - which might have happened years before arthritis appears
- being overweight - this puts extra stress on weight-bearing joints and they become worn under the pressure
- hereditary - if your parents have/had osteoarthritis, you are more likely to develop it.

In many people there is no obvious underlying cause.

When the cartilage becomes damaged, its surface becomes rough, so that the joint cannot move smoothly. The cartilage also becomes weaker. All this leads to inflammation. Inflammation is part of the body's normal healing process but it also produces pain and swelling.

You shouldn't ignore the early warning signs. People often dismiss arthritic pain as "a twinge" or treat it as an acceptable part of ageing. But it isn't! Early detection and diagnosis are crucial in managing the disease so the sooner you talk to your doctor about the symptoms, the better off you will be.

In serious osteoarthritis, the cartilage may become so thin that it splits and no longer cushions the bones. In the worst cases, the bones may grind against one another, which can be extremely painful. Also, in advanced osteoarthritis, the joint can become narrowed and difficult to bend. Small spurs of bone may also grow at the edges of the joint.



The symptoms of osteoarthritis vary from person to person. The most common signs are:

- tenderness
- pain
- stiffness of the joints, including early morning stiffness.

Other symptoms include:

- swelling of the joints, caused by inflammation
- muscle weakness, which causes the joints to feel unstable
- a grinding sensation in the joints
- loss of mobility.

There is no cure for osteoarthritis, but there are things you can do to manage the pain and limit further damage to the cartilage.

The most important thing you can do is exercise the joints. This helps because the cartilage does not have any blood vessels in it and instead relies on the fluid in the joint ("synovial fluid") to provide nutrients and carry away waste products. Moving the joints stimulates the body to produce synovial fluid and keeps it moving around the joint. Exercise also strengthens the muscles that support the joints and gives you greater mobility and flexibility.

See page 19 for more details about exercise.

Rheumatoid arthritis

Rheumatoid arthritis is a disease that causes inflammation of the joints, usually in the hands, feet and knees. It can also affect other organs in the body. Women are three times as likely as men to develop rheumatoid arthritis. It usually starts to develop between the ages of 25 and 50 years.

Doctors and scientists are not entirely certain what causes rheumatoid arthritis. What appears to happen is that the body's immune system attacks the body's own tissues, rather than fighting diseases. When this happens, the tissue surrounding a joint (the "synovial membrane") becomes inflamed and thickened. This causes the body to produce larger than normal amounts of fluid in the joints ("synovial fluid"), which leads to swelling, pain and stiffness.

If the joint continues to be inflamed, the bones, the cartilage that protects the joints, and the muscles and ligaments of the joint can all become damaged. In advanced rheumatoid arthritis, this inflammation and swelling will cause the joint to become deformed as well as produce extreme pain.

The early symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis vary from person to person. The main signs are:

- tenderness
- pain
- early morning stiffness in the joints

- swelling in the joints
- tiredness
- muscle weakness
- weight loss
- loss of mobility.

In the early stages, these symptoms may come and go with no particular pattern, and they often move from one joint to another. In some people the symptoms may disappear for weeks or years - or never appear again. In other people, the symptoms can last a lifetime.

There is no cure for rheumatoid arthritis but there is a lot you can do to control it, manage the pain and live a full life with the disease:

- see your doctor immediately - an early diagnosis will reduce pain, minimise deterioration in your condition and help you maintain mobility
- learn pain management techniques - like relaxation, yoga, and using hot and cold packs
- be physically active, especially water therapy and tai chi - these will strengthen supporting muscles and keep your joints flexible. They will also maintain your feeling of well-being. Before starting an exercise program talk to your doctor.
- get rest - this will prevent swelling in the joints and prevent you from becoming fatigued
- stop smoking - smokers are twice as

likely to get rheumatoid arthritis as non-smokers

- take the medicines recommended by your doctor
- seek support from other people and support groups - for advice, social contact and emotional support
- use mechanical aids - such as walking frames and specially designed eating utensils.

This book will tell you more about how to do each of these things and where to get more information and advice.

Juvenile arthritis

Juvenile arthritis describes a collection of joint diseases that affect children. While some of the forms may resemble adult rheumatoid arthritis, the course of the disease, other organ involvement and treatment may be quite different. Care of children with arthritis is best undertaken by specialist paediatric units. Contact your local State or Territory Arthritis Office for more information.





Gout

Gout affects about 70,000 Australians, although men are nine times as likely as women to get it. The first attack of gout usually happens between the ages

“Gout affects about 70,000 Australians...”

of 40 and 50 years. It normally affects the joint of the big toe first, although it can go on to affect the knees, ankles and hands.

Gout is caused when tiny crystals of uric acid crystallise in the joints. This causes irritation and tissue inflammation.

Uric acid is a waste product produced by the body. The body disposes of it first by dissolving it in the blood, then filtering it through the kidneys, to be finally removed in urine. Some people, however, produce higher-than-normal amounts of uric acid, or else their bodies are unable to filter it out of the blood. The excess uric acid crystallises in the joints and other organs of the body.

Unlike other types of arthritis, which develop slowly, an attack of gout can occur quickly, even overnight.

If an attack of gout is untreated, it will usually last about a week. Another attack may not occur for months, but if the causes of gout are left untreated, attacks may become more common and more severe. They can also spread

to other joints. The crystals can also permanently damage the cartilage of the joint, leading to osteoarthritis.

See pages 4 for information on osteoarthritis

Gout is aggravated by anything that reduces the kidneys' ability to remove uric acid from the blood. This includes taking fluid tablets (diuretics), drinking alcohol, being dehydrated, and over-eating. Avoid all of these things while you suffer from gout.

Medicine can help reduce the amount of uric acid the body produces. However, most people with gout benefit from:

- drinking lots of fluids - this helps the body flush out uric acid
- limiting alcoholic drinks
- avoiding certain foods - including liver, kidneys, brains, anchovies and shellfish
- losing weight - although people with gout should not fast or take “crash diets” because it may stress the kidneys and decrease the removal of uric acid.

Medicines and relaxation techniques can also help you manage the pain during an attack of gout.

This book will tell you more about how to do each of these things and where to get more information and advice.

step two

DON'T DELAY, SEE YOUR DOCTOR

Because arthritis can get worse if left untreated, you need to see your doctor as early as possible to get a proper diagnosis.

This will help you understand your arthritis and develop a plan for managing it. Early diagnosis will reduce pain, minimise deterioration in your condition, and help you maintain mobility.

Your doctor may also order tests including:

- blood tests
- a test of your joint fluid ("synovial fluid")
- a joint examination
- X-rays.

At your next appointment, your doctor will tell you what the results were and what they say about the type of arthritis you have. Your doctor will also discuss your best options for treating and managing your arthritis.

● What to expect when you go to the doctor

When you first visit your doctor, you will be asked a number of questions about your joint pain, including:

- how long you have experienced pain
- which joints are affected
- when you get pain and what seems to cause it
- what makes the joint feel better or worse
- whether anyone else in your family has had arthritis or joint pain.





● What the test results mean

Blood tests

There are several blood tests your doctor may order. The main ones used to check for common types of arthritis are:

- uric acid in your blood - a higher than normal level of uric acid means you may have gout
- antibody tests - antibodies are substances the body normally produces to fight infections from things like bacteria and viruses. In some forms of arthritis that affect the connective tissue - the tissue that binds other tissues and organs together - such as lupus, the body produces a type of antibody called "antinuclear antibody" which attacks the tissues lining the joints (the "synovial membrane"). Another type of antibody found in more than 70% of people with rheumatoid arthritis is "rheumatoid factor".
- inflammation tests - there are two main tests used to check if you have an inflammation: ESR (erythrocyte sedimentation rate) and CRP (C-reactive protein). Together with the other blood tests, your ESR and CRP levels will help your doctor decide whether you have a form of inflammatory arthritis such as rheumatoid arthritis.

Sometimes your doctor may order other, more specialised tests.

At the same time as you have blood tests for arthritis, your doctor may also order tests to check your general health. These will show whether you have any other health conditions that may affect your arthritis or the medicines you can take.

Tests of the joint fluid (synovial fluid)

Depending on how much pain you experience and the joint involved, your doctor may take a sample of fluid from the affected joint.

“Early diagnosis will reduce pain and help you maintain mobility.”

Your doctor will do this by putting a needle directly into the joint, then drawing out a small amount of the fluid. It can hurt slightly, but local anaesthetic may be used

before the procedure. Your doctor will then have the sample checked under a microscope for evidence of and/or the presence of crystals, such as uric acid.

step three

WORK WITH YOUR HEALTHCARE TEAM AND BE AN IMPORTANT PART OF IT

The best way to living well with arthritis is by working closely with your healthcare team.

It may include a variety of healthcare specialists, such as doctors, pharmacists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, podiatrists, chiropractors, nurses and psychologists.

Your doctor may also refer you to a rheumatologist (a specialist in conditions that affect the joints and the structures around them) who can provide you with the most up-to-date information and advice on all aspects of arthritis management and treatment. Your rheumatologist will develop a comprehensive arthritis management program for you and will assess your ongoing response to treatment.

Remember, you are the most important member of your healthcare team. Make sure you establish and maintain good communication with all the other members.

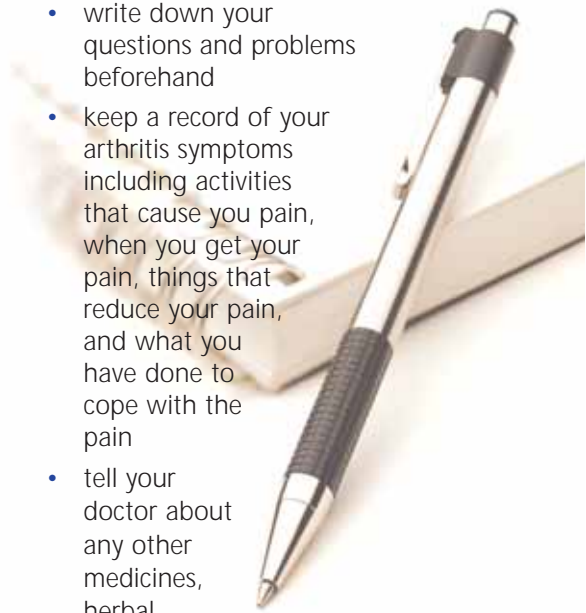
● Making the most of your healthcare team - some tips

Before you visit your doctor or any other health professional, be prepared to:

- write down your questions and problems beforehand
- keep a record of your arthritis symptoms including activities that cause you pain, when you get your pain, things that reduce your pain, and what you have done to cope with the pain
- tell your doctor about any other medicines, herbal remedies, creams or any other medicinal products you are using - including any you have bought from a supermarket, pharmacy or health food store. Any of these may interact with your arthritis medicines and could make you sick.

Your doctor or health professional will find this information helpful when recommending arthritis treatments.

When you visit your doctor or health professional, write down any instructions they give you. Many people often forget what their doctor tells them.





Writing down what they say will help you remember.

If you are unsure about treating your arthritis or planning for the future, discuss this with one of your healthcare team or seek a second opinion. They can also advise you about:

- support services for people with arthritis
- contacting your local State or Territory Arthritis Office.

See page 32 for contact details for your local State or Territory Arthritis Office

Remember,
you are the
most important
member
of your
healthcare
team.



step four

KNOW ABOUT YOUR TREATMENT OPTIONS

There are many treatments to relieve pain and stiffness, maintain flexibility and slow the development of your arthritis.

Work with your healthcare team to find a combination of treatments that best suits:

- your type of arthritis
- the joints affected
- the amount of pain you experience
- your lifestyle
- your activity level.

A treatment program may include a combination of:

- physical therapies including physiotherapy, occupational therapy and podiatry
- medicines including prescription, non-prescription and complementary medicines
- physical activity and exercise
- diet
- pain management techniques such as relaxation and meditation
- emotional and social support
- finding a balance between activity and rest.

This book will give you advice on all of these, as well as where you can get further information and advice.



● Physical therapies

Physical therapies are often an important part of a successful arthritis treatment program.

Physiotherapists, occupational therapists and podiatrists offer a range of non-medicine treatments that will help your joints function better.

When choosing any kind of physical therapist, look for an accredited practitioner or one who is a member of their professional association.

Physiotherapy

Physiotherapists can advise you on exercise, posture, and non-medicine pain relief. They may also use



techniques to maintain the flexibility of your joints and muscles.

Therapies that physiotherapists may use include:

- massage
- hydrotherapy - exercise in water
- thermotherapy - the use of heat or cold to relieve pain
- transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation - the use of mild electrical impulses to nerves in the skin, via electrical pads taped over the back. It is a painless and simple procedure.

Occupational therapy

Occupational therapists can advise you on how to avoid over-stressing your arthritis-affected joints.

“Physical therapies are often an important part of a successful arthritis treatment program.”

They look at all aspects of your daily life, including the work you do inside and outside your home, as well as your leisure activities. They can then show you ways to conserve your energy by simplifying daily tasks, and how to

protect your joints when you are performing those tasks.

Occupational therapists can also advise you on:

- any special equipment you might need to help you get about, such as walking sticks or wheelchairs
- splints and braces you might need.

Podiatry

Podiatrists treat problems in the feet. They can help you with footwear for extra support and comfort.

Good foot and ankle support is particularly important for people with arthritis in the feet, ankles, knees, hips and lower spine.

Medicines

Medicines can help:

- relieve arthritis pain and stiffness
- improve joint function.

The medicine or medicines your doctor prescribes will depend on the severity of your symptoms. The most common examples include:

- painkillers
- creams and ointments
- anti-inflammatory medicines
- injections into the joint
- anti-rheumatoid medicines.

Some of these medicines require a prescription from a doctor, but many are available over-the-counter from pharmacies.

Always talk to your doctor and pharmacist before you start taking any medicines.

All medicines have risks and benefits. Your doctor and pharmacist will help you choose the medicines that are best for your condition and lifestyle.

Tell them about any other medicines you are taking because some medicines should not be taken together.

Make sure your doctor knows about all of your health problems. Some arthritis medicines can affect other health problems such as high blood pressure.

Find out what side effects may occur and watch out for them. Make sure you know what to do if you develop any side effects and how quickly you need to act.

See page 31 for detailed information on arthritis medicines and how to take them safely.

Painkillers (analgesics)

Paracetamol is a simple painkiller used to treat mild to moderate arthritis pain. It is usually the first medicine your doctor will recommend if you need pain relief.

For severe, uncontrolled pain your doctor may prescribe strong painkillers such as a combination of paracetamol and codeine, or tramadol.

Painkillers have no effect on the joint or your arthritis. They simply stop you feeling the pain.



Creams, gels and ointments

These can be rubbed into the skin over a painful joint to relieve pain. There are basically two types of creams and ointments:

- those that relieve pain by warming or cooling the skin when rubbed in
- those that contain an anti-inflammatory medicine.

Anti-inflammatory medicines

These are medicines that treat pain and inflammation. They are usually the next step if simple analgesics, creams, gels and ointments have failed to control your arthritis symptoms.



If your doctor prescribes anti-inflammatory medicine, he or she will normally prescribe “non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs” - commonly referred to as “NSAIDs” (pronounced “ensayeds”) - or Cox-2 inhibitors.

NSAIDs stop the body producing substances that cause pain and inflammation. Cox-2 inhibitors are a special kind of NSAID which are less likely to cause stomach or intestinal problems.

Recent studies suggest that people receiving higher than recommended doses of Cox-2 inhibitors may have an increased risk of heart attack or stroke. Most people will have no problem but do discuss this with your doctor if you are concerned.

Injections into the joint

If you have severe pain and inflammation in a joint that cannot be controlled by painkillers, creams or anti-inflammatory tablets, then your doctor may prescribe an injection directly into the joint.

This will normally be an anti-inflammatory medicine called a corticosteroid. Usually you will not be able to have more than four injections in a year, otherwise the joint can become damaged.

Anti-rheumatoid medicines

Discuss these highly specialised disease-modifying medicines for rheumatoid arthritis with your doctor.

Complementary medicines and therapies

Complementary medicines and therapies for arthritis include a diverse range of products and practices such as magnetic therapy and dietary and herbal supplements. The use of such alternative treatments should be considered cautiously as they are not all regulated and may not be standardised in terms of purity, dosage, effectiveness or safety. This does not mean you should not try complementary therapies but do make sure you are fully informed about the reasons behind the health advice so that you are not misled or given false hope.

Complementary medicines – also known as “traditional” and “alternative” medicines – include vitamin, mineral, plant or herbal, naturopathic and/or homeopathic preparations and some aromatherapy products.

You should take reasonable care when using complementary medicines and therapies, including getting your doctor’s advice. Like food and other medicines, some people may have sensitivities to these products; nutritional supplements may interact with your prescribed medications causing undesirable effects; magnetic therapy may cause interference with pacemakers; and fish oil supplements should not be taken during pregnancy



or if you are intending to get pregnant as the high level of vitamin A they contain may harm the unborn baby.

Complementary medicines can be either listed or registered on the Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods. Low risk products are listed, but products containing higher risk substances and for which the manufacturer makes claims are registered. Registered products undergo scientific testing for quality, safety and effectiveness.

Make informed choices and be wary of products and/or therapies that:

- claim to “cure” arthritis
- claim to work for all types of arthritis and / or other disorders
- claim to be free from all side effects
- don't list the ingredients.

If you are still unsure if an unproven remedy is safe, ring your State or Territory Arthritis Office or ask your doctor or pharmacist for advice.

Joint replacement

If medicines have not worked for you, and you are increasingly unable to go about your day-to-day life because of pain and loss of mobility, you may require joint replacement surgery. These are commonly performed operations and most people find that joint replacement surgery improves their quality of life.

Your doctor will refer you to an orthopaedic surgeon who can advise you on whether surgery is required. To make a fully informed choice about surgery, find out about waiting lists, costs and recovery time.

Glucosamine sulphate

Glucosamine occurs naturally in the body and appears to be involved in the formation and repair of cartilage.

There is growing evidence that glucosamine sulphate could prevent changes in joint structure associated with osteoarthritis and also significantly improve symptoms.

Beware of glucosamine sulphate if you are allergic to shellfish as it is made from prawn and lobster shells. Ask your doctor for advice before taking the supplement and check whether you can take it with your medicines.

Make sure you take the recommended daily dosage. The scientific study trialled glucosamine sulphate over a three-year period. It may take several weeks - perhaps even longer - before you notice any effects.

step five

FIND NEW WAYS TO STAY ACTIVE

Research has found that regular exercise is one of the most effective treatments for arthritis.

Physical activity helps broadly in two ways. Firstly, exercise will help your arthritis by:

- decreasing the pain of arthritis in your joints
- preventing joints from becoming stiff - which will also help avoid deformity
- maintaining and increasing the amount you can move your joints
- strengthening muscles and bones - this will help take the load off your joints, and make the joints more stable
- decreasing or relieving muscle tension - tension adds to the pain of arthritis and in the long term can lead to poor posture and deformity
- improving your posture and balance - this will take weight off affected joints, and reduce your risk of falling.

Secondly, regular exercise will improve your overall health. This means you will be able to do more in life, feel more in control of your arthritis and be better able to manage pain. In particular, exercise will:

- improve your heart and lung fitness and sense of well-being



- help control weight and reduce body fat - this will also reduce the load on weight-bearing joints such as feet, knees and hips
- decrease stress - which will also help reduce sleep problems, headache, heart disease and depression
- improve your sleep
- decrease fatigue and tiredness
- create a feeling of general well-being.

● Types of exercise that are beneficial for arthritis

Not all forms of exercise are appropriate for every kind of arthritis.

Before you start to exercise, it is important to ask your doctor and healthcare team to help you develop a program that will suit your type of arthritis, physical health and lifestyle.

Generally, you will need to do a mix of three types of activities:

- mobility exercises
- strengthening exercises
- fitness exercises.

When you develop an exercise plan, choose activities you will enjoy, not ones that will make your arthritis worse.

Mobility

These are exercises designed to maintain or improve the range of movement of the joints. They involve moving each joint as far as it will comfortably go and then stretching it just a little further - but not to the point of pain.

Mobility exercises are especially important for stiff joints, although all



your joints will benefit from being put through their range of movement each day. Stretching exercises are particularly important if your arthritis affects your ability to move around - for instance, if you have arthritis in the feet, knees, hips or spine.

Strengthening

These exercises are designed to increase the power of the muscles. Strong muscles help to support joints. Strengthening exercises also help strengthen bones and improve balance.

Fitness

These are the exercises that will benefit the heart, lungs and your general well-being. These are usually "whole body" type exercises rather than exercises for a specific joint.



● Examples of exercises that are good for arthritis

There is no one exercise that is right for arthritis. Some types of low-impact exercise that many people with arthritis find helpful include:

- walking - a simple way to increase fitness
- dancing - excellent for flexibility and fitness and also helps build stability in the joints
- yoga and tai chi - good for flexibility and strength, as well as relaxation and stress management
- water exercise classes, such as aqua-aerobic and hydrotherapy
- strength training classes
- stretch classes - good for flexibility
- chair-based exercises.

Hydrotherapy or “water exercise” is a popular exercise for people with arthritis. The warm water helps relax tense muscles, leading to pain relief. The water also takes the weight off joints, allowing you to increase strength and flexibility without damaging the joint or causing pain. Doing strengthening and mobility exercises in water is also a lot of fun.

● Starting an exercise program

If you have not exercised for a while, or if you have other health problems that you think might affect your fitness or mobility, it is best to discuss your exercise program with your doctor or another trained health professional first. They will help you to avoid injury and make the most of your exercise.

Start small and build on your exercise program. Begin at any of the following points:

- simply increasing your physical activity
- 5 minutes exercise per day
- 10 minutes exercise per day, three times a week
- 20 minutes exercise per day, two times a week
- 30 minutes exercise per day, three or four times a week.

When you exercise, move your joints slowly and smoothly. This will help prevent injury and reduce pain. Concentrate on quality rather than quantity.

If the thought of “exercise” seems too hard, try increasing your daily physical activity. For example:

- get off the bus one or two stops earlier than you normally would and walk the rest of the way



- walk up stairs instead of waiting for the lift, or walk up one flight of stairs then take the lift
- park the car a little bit further from the shops instead of looking for the closest parking space.

● Sticking to an exercise program

If you have not been active for a while or you have pain and often feel tired and unwell, it can be difficult to make exercise a regular part of your life. Here are some tips for sticking with an exercise program:

- do activities you enjoy
- do something that is convenient and affordable
- exercise with a friend or in a group
- start gradually and build up
- set short-term goals for what you want to achieve. Write them down and put them on the fridge.
- keep an exercise diary, so you can see how your are progressing
- vary your exercise routine so you don't get bored.

● When to exercise

- Try to do some form of exercise every day, even on bad days.
- Time your medicines so that you

exercise when they are having the most effect.

- Start your exercise with some gentle movements to warm up the body and loosen the joints. This will help prevent pain and damage to the joints.
- Cool down at the end of your exercise with some gentle stretches. This will prevent your muscles stiffening and avoid muscle pain the next day.

● When to stop exercising or be careful

- Don't exercise a joint that is red, hot, swollen or painful. That joint needs rest.
- Don't exercise through pain. Pain is a warning signal.
- Don't do too much too soon because that may cause more pain. Pushing too hard may also damage your joints.
- Use the two hours pain rule - if you have pain two hours after exercising, you've done too much. Next time you exercise, slow down and do less.
- Talk to your doctor or another healthcare professional to review your exercise routine and to discuss any problems you may have that are associated with your exercise program.

step six

LEARN TECHNIQUES TO HELP MANAGE YOUR PAIN

You may have to accept that sometimes medicines, physical therapies and other treatments cannot relieve all of your pain.

However, there are many techniques you can use to cope with pain so you can go on living your life the way you want to.

Pain is individual. What works for one person may not work for another, so you may have to try different techniques until you find what works best for you.

Here are some things you can do to manage your arthritis pain:

- make sure you are making the most of your medicines and physical therapies. Visit your doctor regularly - every 2-3 months - to make sure you are getting the best treatment for your arthritis symptoms.
- take care of your body. Exercise to improve your fitness and strength, eat a healthy diet, and get good night's sleep every night.
- use heat and cold treatments for extra pain relief. A warm bath or shower, or a heating pad placed over a painful joint for 15 minutes, can provide effective pain relief.



An ice pack may reduce swelling and relieve pain in the same way. Ask your doctor or physical therapist which type of treatment (hot or cold) is best for you.

- find some distraction techniques that work for you. These may include exercising, reading, listening to music, or seeing a movie. Anything that focuses your attention on something enjoyable, instead of your pain, will help you.
- learn some relaxation techniques. When you are stressed, your muscles tense up, making pain feel more severe. Relaxation techniques such as meditation or deep breathing help decrease muscle tension.

step seven

ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR FEELINGS AND SEEK SUPPORT

It is natural to feel frustrated, angry, scared and even depressed at the prospect of having arthritis.

Many people with arthritis fear what the future might hold and are frightened by the impact arthritis might have on their everyday life. It is not unusual either for a young person to feel especially angry or depressed at being diagnosed with a disease that is mistakenly thought to affect only "old" people.

How to cope

Arthritis sufferers often feel irritated about their limitations. This is a natural reaction. There are some things that you not be able to do anything about or activities you may no longer be able to do - like running a marathon or going mountain climbing. Part of learning to live well with arthritis is to accept that certain things are no longer possible. To help you cope with the changes that arthritis brings you need to:

- find new activities and challenges that you can do with arthritis and that will give you satisfaction
 - think about this process of adjustment as "just another part of growing" - it is about learning new skills and adjusting to experiences
- talk to people who have gone through what you are experiencing. Their experiences may not be identical but they can tell you about things that helped them.
 - talk to your friends, your doctor, a counsellor or a psychologist if you have strong feelings of loss or unhappiness. You are not alone, and do not have to make





these adjustments all by yourself. There are always people who can listen to you and help. Most people find talking through their experiences helpful.

Stress

Stress is the body's response to pressure. When you are in a demanding situation, the brain releases chemicals that stimulate

“...talk to people who have gone through what you are experiencing...”

the rest of the body; the heart beats faster, the breathing changes, blood pressure rises, and muscles tense. People with arthritis need to learn how to manage

stress, otherwise it can lead to muscle tension, pain, and depression.

Things that can cause you to feel stressed when you have arthritis include:

- pain
- being more dependent upon family and friends
- experiencing new limitations in your life
- being tired and lacking energy.

Managing stress involves two steps:

1. recognising when you are becoming stressed - learn to listen to your body

2. finding activities that will relieve stress.

There are many ways you can reduce stress. Talk to your doctor and other members of your healthcare team to find solutions that work for you.

Some things that you can do for yourself that will help manage stress include:

- being physically and mentally active - but don't overdo it to the point of fatigue
- learning relaxation techniques - like meditation, yoga and tai chi
- learning deep breathing techniques - slowing and deepening your breathing will counteract the body's stress response of breathing fast and shallow. Slow, deep breathing can also slow your heart rate.
- talking to friends and your healthcare team about things you find stressful - researchers have found that some people also benefit from writing about stressful experiences
- learning what situations you find stressful and either avoiding them, changing them, or learning how to use your relaxation techniques when they occur
- getting support from arthritis groups.



Dealing with depression

Depression is an illness. Despite what many people believe, it has nothing to do with willpower or strength of character. Generally it can be successfully treated.

Depression is an extremely common condition in today's society. Signs to watch for are:

- feeling overwhelmed
- feeling uncontrollably sad
- withdrawing from friends and family
- losing interest in sex
- thinking that no one understands what you are going through
- feeling unable to cope, even with everyday things
- losing weight
- sleeping patterns that are abnormal
- losing concentration and not thinking clearly.

Like any other illness, the sooner you seek treatment the quicker you will find relief from your condition. Do not be afraid or embarrassed to speak with your doctor or other health professional. They will be able to reassure you that your feelings are not unusual and that depression can be treated safely and effectively.

What type of treatment will be most effective will depend on how long you have been depressed, how severe your

depression is and what sort of treatments you think might help you. Treatment may include:

- medicine
- counselling
- if necessary, consultation with a psychiatrist.

If you are depressed, one thing that will also help you greatly is finding someone you feel comfortable talking to, and expressing your feelings. This could be a

member of your family, a friend, your doctor, a psychologist or a support group. You are not alone. Ask for help and support when you need it.

“the sooner you seek treatment, the sooner you will find relief...”

Contact your local State or Territory Arthritis Office to find out more about support services for arthritis patients or speak to your doctor.

step eight

MAKE FOOD CHOICES THAT COUNT

● Food and arthritis

There are many myths about food and arthritis. Unfortunately, most of it is wishful thinking. There is very little scientific evidence that diet has an effect on arthritis. For example, it is unproven that “acidic” foods such as tomatoes can cause arthritis or make it worse.

Except for gout, most foods will not have a direct effect on your arthritis, or on the pain and stiffness you experience. Be very cautious of special diets or supplements that claim to “cure” arthritis or control its symptoms.

However a good diet is important for maintaining your general health and is very important for a disease like arthritis, because it will affect your well-being and how positive you feel.

If you are overweight, a healthy diet will also help you reduce your weight, which will lessen the pressure on weight-bearing joints (knees, ankles, hips and spine). This will help reduce the amount of pain you experience.

● The elements of a healthy diet

The Australian Guide to Healthy Eating shows how to eat a healthy diet by:

- choosing a variety of foods from all the food groups every day
- eating plenty of plant foods (bread, cereal, rice, pasta, legumes, vegetables and fruit)
- eating moderate amounts of animal foods (milk, yoghurt, cheese, lean meat, fish, poultry and eggs)
- eating small amounts of polyunsaturated and monounsaturated margarines and oils
- avoiding saturated fats like butter, dripping, copha, palm oil
- drinking lots of water.

Polyunsaturated fats include the omega 3 and omega 6 fats. Monounsaturated fats are predominantly found in foods like olive oil, canola oil and avocados. Palm oil is often the hidden ingredient in most processed biscuits (it is sometimes identified on the ingredients list as vegetable oil). If either palm or vegetable oil is one of the top three ingredients it will most likely be a high saturated fat product. Saturated fats also include the fat found on meats and in dairy products like milk and cheese. Choose low fat varieties when buying dairy products.

People with rheumatoid arthritis often lose their appetite. If this happens to you, try eating more meals in smaller portions throughout the day. This will help provide the sustenance you need.

step eight

Avoid fasting or crash dieting because it will only make your symptoms worse.

For more information about The Australian Guide to Healthy Eating visit www.health.gov.au/pubhlth/strateg/food/guide/index



www.health.gov.au/pubhlth/strateg/food/guide/index

For more advice on how to have a balanced diet, talk to a dietitian or nutritionist.

It is not the amount of each that is important but the balance between them. You should try to reduce the amount of omega 6-containing foods, and increase the amount of omega 3-containing foods in your diet. A ratio of 1:6 is recommended for omega 6 to omega 3 fatty acids in the diet.

Foods that are high in omega 6 and which should be reduced include:

- vegetable oils (primarily) such as sunflower, safflower, soya bean, corn and cottonseed
- brazil nuts, peanuts and almonds.

Foods that are rich in omega 3 fatty acids:

- fish and seafood
- linseeds and linseed oil (also called flaxseed) and canola oil (also called rapeseed oil)
- wheat germ
- walnuts and pecans.

● Foods that affect and reduce inflammation

Omega 3 oils

Although most foods have no effect on arthritis, scientific studies have shown that the type of fats in your diet may influence the amount of inflammation you have:

- omega 3 fatty acids may help reduce inflammation
- omega 6 fatty acids are not helpful.

● Diet and gout

Because gout is caused by a build up of uric acid in the blood, you can influence it by eliminating foods that cause your body to produce large amounts of uric acid (called "purines"). Scientists have found that eliminating the following from your diet will help:

- offal meats - including liver, kidneys and brains
- shellfish and anchovies.



Also, eat in ways that will help your kidneys eliminate waste products from your body easily:

- limit the amount of alcohol you drink or stop drinking alcohol altogether
- drink plenty of non-alcoholic fluids, including water and tea
- don't overeat on a regular basis
- take your time when eating - don't rush.

For more information about healthy eating, diet and arthritis refer to nutritionist Catherine Saxelby's website at www.foodwatch.com.au



www.foodwatch.com.au



step nine

BALANCE YOUR LIFE

When you have arthritis, you need to find the right balance between work, activity and rest.

Many people find arthritis a tiring disease particularly if they are in pain. If you find this to be the case, listen to your body and be guided by it. Rest when you are tired and don't force yourself to work or exercise through pain.

Because you might not be able to always achieve everything you want to in one day, make a list of the

things you need to do, in order of importance and do them first. Be flexible - if you are having a bad day, be prepared to change your plans.

Review your "to do list" regularly

to ensure you are setting realistic goals and not putting unnecessary pressure on yourself.

Find leisure activities that are not only easily achievable but also personally satisfying.

Visit an occupational therapist to discover ways you can save time and energy.

“...listen to your body and be guided by it...”

step ten

CALL YOUR LOCAL STATE OR TERRITORY ARTHRITIS OFFICE

You can have arthritis and still get the most out of life. You don't have to stop doing the things you love doing.

Contact your local State or Territory Arthritis Office to take part in an arthritis self-management course. This will show you how you can change your lifestyle to lessen the impact of arthritis in your life. This problem-solving course will also help you understand issues related to managing arthritis yourself.

The self-management course will introduce you to a wide range of skills including:

- how to manage symptoms such as fatigue and depression
- how to communicate effectively with your doctor and other health professionals
- how to lessen your frustration
- how to fight fatigue
- how to get more out of life.

Each State and Territory Arthritis Office runs arthritis self-management courses in both city and rural areas.

Self-management courses run over six weeks for two hours each week. The course is conducted by people who are trained according to the national, accredited guidelines of Arthritis Australia. Phone your local State or

Territory Arthritis Office now to find out more about a course near you.

See page 32 for how to contact your local State or Territory Arthritis Office

Arthritis Australia Offices all around the country also hold information sessions. Everyone is welcome to attend. These are a great way to learn more, meet other people with arthritis and share your experiences in a caring atmosphere.

Congratulations!

Just by learning more about living well with arthritis means you are already on your way to successfully managing your arthritis and lessening its impact on your life. Now it is time to put what you have learned into practice.

Re-visit the arthritis check list on page 3 from time to time to ensure that you continue to maintain control over your arthritis.

MORE ABOUT ARTHRITIS MEDICINES

All medicines have risks and benefits.

Always talk to your doctor or pharmacist about the medicines you are taking and what you are using them for, so they can help you choose the most effective medicine for your arthritis.

Before you take any kind of medicine

Tell your doctor if you have allergies to:

- any medicines - particularly aspirin, painkillers or anti-inflammatory medicines
- any other substances - such as foods, preservatives or dyes

Tell your doctor if you are pregnant or if you intend to become pregnant or if you are breastfeeding. Some medicines used to treat pain and inflammation are not recommended during pregnancy or if you are intending to get pregnant or if you are breastfeeding. Your doctor can advise you on the risks and benefits of using arthritis medicines while you are pregnant or if you intend to become pregnant or if you are breastfeeding.

Tell your doctor if you have any other medical conditions, apart from your arthritis because they may affect the medicines you can take and the best dose for you.

Taking other medicines

Tell your doctor about all of the other medicines you are taking, including any that you buy without a prescription from a pharmacy, supermarket or health food shop. Some medicines may interfere with arthritis treatments which means you may need to take different amounts of your medicine, or you may need to take different medicines.

Read the Consumer Medicine Information leaflet

Consumer Medicine Information (CMI for short) leaflets are available for all prescription medicines and some medicines that you buy over-the-counter at a pharmacy.

Ask your pharmacist or doctor for a Consumer Medicine Information leaflet for your medicine. You can also find CMI leaflets on the internet at www.medimate.org.au

CMI leaflets provide easy to understand information on:

- what the medicine is for
- things to think about before using the medicine
- how to use the medicine
- possible side effects and what to do if they occur.



Arthritis

AUSTRALIA

Arthritis Australia
1st Floor
52 Parramatta Road
Forest Lodge NSW 2037

 **Mail:**
GPO Box 121 Sydney NSW 2001

 **Phone:**
02 9552 6085

 **Fax:**
02 9552 6078

 **Email:**
info@arthritisaustralia.com.au

For all arthritis information:

FREECALL

 **1800 011 041**

WEBSITE

www.arthritisaustralia.com.au

State & Territory offices:



Arthritis ACT

Level 2B Grant Cameron Community
Centre 27 Mulley Street
Holder ACT 2611
PO Box 4017 Weston Creek ACT 2611



Arthritis New South Wales

13 Harold Street
North Parramatta NSW 2151
Locked Bag 16 Post Office
North Parramatta NSW 2151



Arthritis Northern Territory

6 Caryota Court
Coconut Grove NT 0810
PO Box 452 Nightcliff NT 0814



Arthritis Queensland

1 Cartwright Street
Windsor Qld 4030
PO Box 2121 Windsor Qld 4030



Arthritis South Australia

Unit 1 202-208 Glen Osmond Road
Fullarton SA 5063



Arthritis Tasmania

127 Argyle Street
Hobart Tas 7004
GPO Box 1843 Hobart Tas 7001



Arthritis Victoria

263-265 Kooyong Road
Elsternwick Vic 3185
PO Box 130 Caulfield South Vic 3162



Arthritis Western Australia

17 Lemnos Street
Shenton Park WA 6008
PO Box 34 Wembley WA 6913

● Independent Living Centres

Independent Living Centres are able to guide you in sourcing a range of equipment and products that can help you manage day-to-day challenges with more ease. The centres do not sell items but are a one-stop reference for discovering what is available and where you can buy it.

Contact your local Independent Living Centre for further information.

ACT

24 Parkinson Street Weston ACT 2611
Tel: (02) 6205 1900

NSW

No 1 Fennell Street, North Parramatta
NSW 2150
Tel: 1300 885 886
Website: www.ilcnsw.asn.au

Qld

Cnr Goring St & Cavendish Rd
Coorparoo Qld 4151
Tel: 1300 885 886
Website: www.ilcqld.org.au

SA

11 Blacks Road Gilles Plains SA 5086
Tel: 1800 800 523
Website: www.ilc.asn.au

Tas

46 Canning Street
Launceston Tas 7250
Tel: (03) 6334 5899 or
1300 651 166 (Tasmania Only)
Website: www.ilctas.asn.au

Vic

705 Geelong Road Brooklyn Vic 3025
Tel: (03) 9362 6111 or
1800 686 533 (Victorian Country)
Website: www.deis.vic.gov.au

WA

Suite A The Niche 11 Aberdare Road,
Nedlands WA 6009
Tel: 1300 885 886
Website: www.ilc.com.au





10 steps for
living well
with arthritis



Arthritis Australia 1st Floor 52 Parramatta Road Forest Lodge NSW 2037
Mail: GPO Box 121 Sydney NSW 2001 **Phone:** 02 9552 6085
Fax: 02 9552 6078 **Email:** info@arthritisaustralia.com.au
Web: www.arthritisaustralia.com.au **Freecall:** 1800 011 041