

How to master your arthritis: Do's and don'ts

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Arthritis can be very limiting, but it doesn't have to rule your life. Get tips on arthritis, exercise and other common concerns when coping with arthritis symptoms and arthritis pain. Your target should be "Take control of your pain, so it doesn't control you".

This summary will give you the most important advice about exercise, medication and stress reduction, but how do you know what will work best for you? Here are some do's and don'ts to help you figure it out.

Arthritis:

It is not true that nothing can be done with the pain of arthritis, but it is also true that there is no magic potion that will work immediately. Treatment will take time in this condition

- **Do's**

Whatever your condition, you'll have an easier time staying ahead of your pain if you:

- Talk to your doctor about all your symptoms, arthritis related or not. Sometimes seemingly unrelated problems are, in fact, connected.
- Give your doctor complete information about all your medical conditions, not just arthritis.
- Ask your doctor for a clear definition of the type of arthritis you have.
- Find out whether any of your joints are already damaged.
- Get prepared to go with the flow: arthritis is not a single disease. There are about more than 100 types of diabetes and the treatment for all the types of diabetes are not the same. Initially with the consultation of doctor you can take some pain relief medicine than adjust your medicine after proper test and with the help of an expert.
- Stay focused on yourself as well as the treatment goals: usually for fast relief people suffering from arthritis ask their friends and relatives, what they take if they too suffer from this problem. But it is not advisable as it is not necessary that what works for one will also work for another arthritis patient. So concentrate in your own problem.
- Should be realistic with your expectations: person suffering from the pain of arthritis has to consider physical therapy, dietary changes, natural and alternative treatments in addition to prescription medications. There is no magic pill that will wipe away the problem immediately. For complete relief it will take some time.

- **Don't:**

- Don't go for self treatment for unlimited and unreasonable amount of time: people suffering from arthritis pain want immediate relief from their pain. So initially they try to self- treat their

problem. So they must do this job with the help of a doctor and with full observation that their self- treatment is working properly or not while treating their pain.

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- **Exercises for Arthritis:**

Exercise is important for healthy joints. Moving your joints daily helps keep them fully mobile. Strengthening the surrounding muscles helps support the joints. Also, joint movement transports nutrients and waste products to and from the cartilage, the material which protects and cushions the ends of the bones.

- **Everyday routines:**

You will be amazed to know that just changing some of your everyday routines can be a form of exercise.

Do some gentle exercise in the evening; you'll feel less stiff in the morning. When you're technically doing nothing — watching TV or sitting at your desk, for instance — be sure to:

- Adjust your position frequently.
- Periodically tilt your neck from side to side, change the position of your hands, and bend and stretch your legs.
- Pace yourself. Take breaks so that you don't overuse a joint and cause more pain.

- **Active physical exercise:**

When you have arthritis, movement can decrease your pain, improve your range of motion, strengthen your muscles and increase your endurance and it's important for you to understand why each is important:

- **Range-of-motion Exercises**

Range-of-motion exercises are gentle stretching exercises that aim to move each joint through their normal maximum range of motion. These exercises need to be done daily to help keep joints fully mobile and prevent stiffness and deformities.

Range-of-motion exercises are important for arthritis patients who -- because of intense or chronic pain -- shy away from moving their joints through their full range. Some people believe that normal daily activities take joints through their full range of motion but this is not the case. Normal daily activities, such as housework, dressing, bathing, and cooking are not a substitute for range-of-motion exercises.

- **Strengthening Exercises**

Strengthening exercises help increase muscle strength. Strong muscles help support the joints -- making the joints more stable and helping you move more easily and with less pain. The two types of strengthening exercises are isometric and isotonic.

1. Isometric exercises involve tightening the muscles, without moving the joints. These exercises are especially useful when joint motion is impaired.
2. Isotonic exercises involve strengthening the muscles by moving the joints.

• **Endurance Exercises**

Endurance exercises are physical activities that bring your heart rate up to your optimal target level for at least 20 to 30 minutes. Your target heart rate is computed based on age and physical condition. By raising the heart rate, endurance exercises improve cardiovascular fitness. Endurance exercises should be performed at least three times a week to build on their effectiveness.

Do's:

- Choose the right kinds of activities — those that build the muscles around your joints but don't damage the joints themselves.
- Focus on stretching, range of motion exercises and gradual progressive strength training.
- Include low-impact aerobic exercise, such as walking, cycling or water exercises, for improving your mood and helping control your weight.

Don'ts (Avoid):

- Running
- Jumping
- Tennis
- High-impact aerobics
- Repeating the same movement, such as a tennis serve, again and again
- Inactivity, which can lead to muscle atrophy and further decrease joint stability

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Treat the pain:

If you have been diagnosed with arthritis, it's important to know about the different types of pain relief medication. One of the most basic principles of managing rheumatoid arthritis is also the most obvious: treat the pain!

There are many effective pain medicines your doctor could choose from. Unlike DMARDs (disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drugs), these medicines don't slow down the joint damage that arthritis can cause. However, they do make living with arthritis easier. However, do not forget that there is no medication that is completely free of side effects. Talk with your doctor to formulate a medication plan for your specific pain symptoms.

Do's:

- First, rest. Mild, occasional pain may need nothing more than rest and the application of cold or heat. Rest the painful joint, and apply cold packs to relieve pain or hot packs to ease stiff and achy joints and muscles.
- For occasional pain. Take over-the-counter (OTC) medications such as paracetamol as directed on the bottle to relieve occasional pain triggered by activity your muscles and joints aren't used to — such as gardening after a winter indoors. Paracetamol is a well-known over-the-counter medication. Its main advantage is its safety. When taken as directed, it has few side effects in most people. One exception is people with liver disease, who can take paracetamol only under close supervision by a doctor.
- For longer periods of pain. Take OTC ibuprofen for one or two days if pain related to unaccustomed activity persists. Follow the dosing directions on the package. Ibuprofen (and naproxen in the USA) are classified as nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) because they reduce inflammation as well as pain. Aspirin also relieves pain, but it's typically used for purposes other than reducing inflammation.
- When you anticipate pain. Try taking one dose of paracetamol, ibuprofen or naproxen a few hours before you start an activity that's likely to cause joint pain.
- When pain persists. Consult your doctor if these medications aren't relieving your pain.

Don't (avoid):

Overtreatment: Talk with your doctor if you find yourself using paracetamol, aspirin or NSAIDs regularly.

Undertreatment: Don't try to ignore severe and prolonged arthritis pain. It may mean you have joint damage requiring daily medication.

Focusing only on pain: Depression is more common in people with arthritis. Doctors have found that treating depression with antidepressants and other therapies reduces not only depression symptoms, but also arthritis pain.

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Physical and emotional integration:

It's no surprise that arthritis pain has a negative effect on your mood. If everyday activities make you hurt, you're bound to feel discouraged. But when these normal feelings escalate to create a constant refrain of fearful, hopeless thoughts, your pain can actually get worse and harder to manage.

Do's:

Therapies that interrupt destructive mind-body interactions include:

- Behavioral therapy: This well-studied, effective combination of talk therapy and behavior modification helps you identify — and break — cycles of self-defeating thoughts and actions.
- Lifestyle changes: Being overweight can increase complications of arthritis and contribute to arthritis pain. Making incremental, permanent lifestyle changes resulting in gradual weight loss is often the most effective method of weight management. And if you smoke, find a way to quit. Smoking causes stress on connective tissues, which leads to more arthritis pain.
- Journaling and other coping skills: The emotional release of journaling about your feelings, as well as using other coping skills, can result in decreased sensation of pain.
- Acupuncture. Some people experience pain relief through acupuncture treatments, when a trained acupuncturist inserts hair-thin needles at specific points on your body.

Don't (avoid):

- Smoking: If you're addicted to tobacco, you may use it as an emotional coping tool. But it's highly counterproductive: the toxins in smoke cause stress on connective tissue, leading to more joint problems.
- A negative attitude: Negative thoughts are self-perpetuating. As long as you keep dwelling on them, they keep escalating until you believe the worst. Using negative thoughts to cope with pain can actually increase your risk of disability and pain. Instead, focus on adaptive therapies like distraction or calming statements.

Lastly, dealing with pain can be the hardest part of having arthritis or a related condition, but be sure you can manage it and tackle its impact on your life.

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