

# Aging Joints

By Kate McCarthy

A sharp burning, ripping pain... a constant pins and needles sting... a throbbing, traveling ache... the constant echo of hurt ... the pain of Arthritis is experienced differently by those who suffer from it. For some it is stiffness and discomfort when rising in the morning for others it is chronic and disabling pain which travels through the body like a hot fiery poker.



*Joint pain can be one of the most crippling aspects of living with arthritis.*

Arthritis literally means “joint inflammation,” but the term really defines more than 100 different conditions which affect joints throughout the body. Symptoms of arthritis can include swelling, pain, stiffness and a decrease in range of motion as the disease influences the muscles, tissues and the bones associated with joints. People of all ages, sexes, and races can suffer from arthritis and it is the leading cause of disability in America. More than 50 million adults and 300,000 children have some type of arthritis. Arthritis is more common among women and it occurs more frequently as people age. There are two common types of arthritis which are prevalent among the aging, Osteoarthritis and Rheumatoid Arthritis.

## Osteoarthritis

Considered a common form of joint disease, OA usually afflicts people over the age of 60. Although many elderly experience this type of arthritis in some degree or another, it is not considered an inevitable part of aging. Generally those with this disease deal with limitations in their movement and experience pain. Osteoarthritis usually affects weight-bearing joints and is commonly associated with a deterioration or breakdown of the joint itself. Osteoarthritis destroys the cartilage which acts as a cushion-like

connection between the joints. When everything is working well, the cartilage protects the bones of the joint from rubbing on each other. When Osteoarthritis attacks the cartilage it begins to die and disintegrate leaving the joint to grind bone on bone, causing pain.

Carrying extra weight can really add stress to the lower body joints and is a documented factor in the development of Osteoarthritis. At risk, in particular, are knees and hips. For every extra pound a person gains, an added 4 pounds of pressure are on the knees and each pound increases the pressure on the hips by a factor of 6.

Another common factor in the onset of OA is injury or overuse of joints. Former athletes have a higher risk of developing Osteoarthritis as they age due to increased stress or sport related injuries and on their joints when they were young. Even those who were not athletic their youth can develop problems as they age due to repetitive motion that put stress on their joints.

Genetics can also play a role in the onset of Osteoarthritis, especially when there is a family history of arthritis in the hands. Families pass on bone abnormalities which affect the joint shape and causes problems with the cartilage.

## Rheumatoid Arthritis

Considered a chronic autoimmune disease, RA is a systemic inflammatory condition that causes joint destruction. Currently there is little understanding why those with Rheumatoid Arthritis develop an immune system that attacks itself. The immune system, normally used to fight infection, attacks the joint causing inflammation, swelling, stiffness and pain. Rheumatoid Arthritis causes progressive deterioration of the joints and often often results in permanent joint damage, deformity and disability.

The onset of Rheumatoid Arthritis can be as early as in the mid-twenties and affects people throughout their lives. RA presents itself with swelling and stiffness in the joints of the shoulders and neck, hands and wrists, hips, knees and feet and is often more noticeable in the mornings or when the body is resting. Because RA affects the entire body, other symptoms such as fever, weight loss, fatigue and loss of appetite are often

associated with RA and the inflammation can affect the body's glands, blood vessels and the lining of the heart and lungs.

## Managing Arthritis

What can individuals with arthritis do to decrease the pain associate with this disease?

- ✓ Exercising is a key component to improving health and can help ease some symptoms of arthritis. Studies have shown even two minutes of exercise daily is enough to ease pain, improve energy levels, strengthen muscles that support joints, increase joint range of motion, plus lose excess pounds that add stress to painful joints. Pool-walking and water aerobics can be an incredible workout that does not strain joints. Stretching and building strength in muscles through yoga and Tia chi can also be beneficial for those who suffer with Arthritis pain. Walking, biking and swimming are other good options.

It is important to balance activity with rest. Moderate movement with Arthritis is beneficial, but over exercising can cause increase in joint pain.

- ✓ Eating a healthy balance diet with an emphasis on food with anti-inflammation properties can make a real difference in levels of arthritic pain. Focus on consuming lean or low fat source of protein, food rich in calcium and dark green and orange vegetables and foods rich in antioxidants such as fruit. Tart cherries, blueberries and raspberries can help limit inflammation and pain levels in joints.

Along with exercising and diet, there are other options to help manage arthritic pain. Consult with your family physician about medications that may be of benefit to you such as vitamins, and/or supplements associated with relief from arthritis pain.



HomeAid Health Care  
*Helping Hands at Home*

Kate McCarthy is Director of Operations for HomeAid Health Care which provides services for the elderly who wish to remain safe and independent at home. HomeAid is sister company to Prairie Home Assisted Living which has served the physical, spiritual, mental and health needs of their residents since 1999. Together the two companies provide comprehensive care for the elderly in the Fox Valley area of Wisconsin.

