

QUALITY OF LIFE WITH ARTHRITIS



It is difficult to watch the ones you love struggle to perform daily tasks that they used to do with ease. However, while arthritis is not curable, there are many options for improving quality of life.

There are over 100 variants of arthritis, including osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, gout, lupus, scleroderma, and ankylosing spondylitis. Arthritis is any condition which causes swelling of one or more joints, causing stiffness and pain. Often the conditions worsen with age but are not specifically age-related.

The most common and well-known types of arthritis are osteo and rheumatoid.

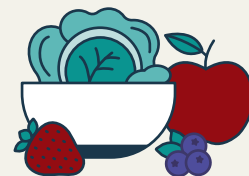
Osteoarthritis involves damage to the cartilage on a joint. As the cartilage wears down, the bones end up grinding against one another causing pain and restricted movement.

Rheumatoid Arthritis is an auto-immune condition which is an attack by the body's immune system on the linings of the joint capsule (a membrane that encloses all the joint parts). It initially causes inflammation but eventually can destroy cartilage and bone within the joints. About 75% of rheumatoid arthritis sufferers are women.



Diet and rheumatoid arthritis

Red meat, sugar, alcohol, fat, salt, caffeine, dairy, and nightshade plants (tomatoes, potatoes and peppers) can worsen the condition.



Early clinical trials have shown that a low-fat plant-based diet has improved the condition after just a month. High fiber diets can lower the risk for knee osteoarthritis.

Source: [Physician's Committee for Responsible Medicine](#)

The most common signs of arthritis are:

Pain

Stiffness

Swelling

Redness

Decreased range of motion

The challenge can be that, for our older adults, some of these are signs of other conditions as well. Take into consideration whether your loved one also has the following risk factors:

Family history

Some types of arthritis are genetic.

Advanced age

Age is not a cause of arthritis but does increase the risk.

Gender

Women are more likely to develop rheumatoid arthritis while men tend to develop gout or other variants.

Previous joint injuries

These can increase the chance of arthritis developing in that joint.

Obesity

Increased weight puts added stress on joints. If your loved one has other risk factors, that would be an additional reason to pay extra attention to diet and exercise.

Source: [Johns Hopkins Medicine](#), [American College of Rheumatology](#) and [Mayo Clinic](#)


Treatment


Arthritis has no cure. All treatments are aimed at improving quality of life. Treatments can be pharmaceutical or holistic in nature dependent on the patient's desires.


Commonly used arthritis medications include:


- NSAIDs are non-steroidal anti-inflammatories that are Over-The-Counter.
- Counterirritants are creams that contain menthol or capsaicin.
- Steroids like prednisone reduce inflammation and can slow joint damage. They do have side effects from ongoing use and should be closely monitored by your loved one's medical team.
- DMARDs (Disease-Modifying-Antirheumatic-Drugs) are used with rheumatoid arthritis to slow the progression of the disease. There is an increased risk of infection with these drugs.


More holistic treatments include:


 **Exercise** can increase range of motion and help with the stiffness to be expected as arthritis progresses. Close attention should be paid to the amount of pain that movements cause. Swimming and water related exercises are good alternatives.


 **Weight loss** removes pressure on aching joints.


 **Acupuncture** is used to reduce many types of pain.


 **Glucosamine and Chondroitin** have both been proven in some studies to help with arthritis pain.

 **Fish Oil** can reduce some arthritis symptoms. However, fish oil can interfere with some medications. Check with your medical team to ensure other medications are compatible.

 **Yoga and Tai Chi** are both slow moving forms of exercise that increase strength, improve mobility and help with range of motion. Find a class that is experienced with the challenges of older adults.

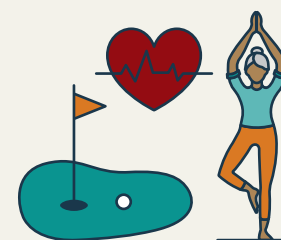
 **Heat and cold** can help reduce inflammation or increase mobility.

 **Massage** increases blood flow and will temporarily relieve pain. Find a therapist who is knowledgeable about the pain associated with arthritis.

 **A variety of assistive devices** are available to help keep your loved one mobile. These include canes, shoe inserts, walkers, and raised toilet and chair seats.

As the disease progresses, there are times when a doctor might suggest more intensive surgical measures including joint repair, joint replacement (most often hips and knees), and joint fusion (most often wrist, ankle and fingers).

Source: [Johns Hopkins Medicine](#), [American College of Rheumatology](#) and [Mayo Clinic](#)



Exercise and arthritis

Exercise can help with weight loss as well as mobility. Some exercises that your loved one might enjoy include:

- Water walking
- Water aerobics
- Swimming
- Bocce Ball
- Golf
- Shuffleboard
- Walking outdoors or on a treadmill
- Pilates, Tai Chi or yoga

Source: [Arthritis Foundation](#)