

# Treating Arthritis

Osteoarthritis cannot be cured. However, there are treatment options that can ease your symptoms and slow the progression of damage to your joints.

There are two main goals of treatment: to control your pain and to regain function in your joint.

Depending on how far your arthritis has progressed; and your age, lifestyle, and overall health, your healthcare provider will design a treatment plan that is individual for you.

If your Arthritis is mild, try hot and cold compresses on the joint regularly to reduce pain. Cold packs numb the painful joint and reduce swelling, while heat relaxes your muscles and increases blood circulation.

*“Sometimes after a long day, if it’s one of those days when my back has been aching a lot, I’ll just get the heating pad out and sit on that, and heat does help.”*

Include low-impact exercise in your daily routine. Exercises that increase muscle strength can reduce the pain of arthritis. Strong muscles help support and protect the joint, making it easier to move.

Flexibility exercises can help restore range of motion in the joint and increase flexibility. And all exercise can help you lose weight and feel better overall, both benefits when you have arthritis.

When you are planning to exercise, apply a heat pack or cream to the painful joint before you exercise.

It is usually recommended to use ice, not heat, on a painful joint after exercise. Ice reduces muscle pain and swelling after a workout activity.

Talk to your healthcare provider before starting any exercise program, to ensure you are doing the exercises safely and correctly. Ask about specific exercises that can help increase strength and relieve your arthritis pain.

When trying to relieve your arthritis pain, your healthcare provider may recommend an over-the-counter anti-inflammatory medicine. These medications, sometimes called NSAIDS, help reduce the swelling in your joints while at the same time relieving your pain.

Acetaminophen (Tylenol) reduces pain. It does not, however, reduce the swelling in your joints which may be one of the causes of your pain.

Talk to your healthcare provider about the best medication for you.

If you find you are taking over-the-counter medications to reduce pain and swelling for more than 2 weeks, talk to your healthcare provider.

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A prescription pain reliever may work better for you.

For medications to be effective, take them exactly as prescribed.

*“I really didn’t know how well the pain medication was working until one time I had to have a procedure and I had to be off it for five days. And my knees ached like a toothache. So, I know, you know, that it’s really working well.”*

Your healthcare provider may recommend other medical procedures to help manage your Arthritis.

For example, some of the excess fluid in a specific joint can be removed right in your doctor’s office.

Removing the excess fluid can help relieve the pressure on your joint and therefore, help relieve your pain.

At the same time, your healthcare provider may inject corticosteroids into the joint. Corticosteroids quickly reduce the swelling in a specific joint. Although they are not pain relievers, reducing inflammation at the joint can also reduce your pain.

When the pain from your arthritis is not controlled with medications or other treatments, or when pain prevents you from taking part in the normal activities of everyday living, your healthcare provider may recommend joint replacement surgery.

Joint replacement surgery removes the damaged parts of your joint and replaces them with new, artificial parts.

Meet with your healthcare provider on a regular basis to see if your treatment plan is working for you. If you find your pain increasing or the function in your joint decreasing, you may need to change part of your treatment plan.

Work together with your healthcare provider to find the best treatment options for you.