

Coping & Comfort

**There's no better instructor than experience.
Here's some sound counsel from people who live well with arthritis.**



FROM THE EXPERTS AT THE ARTHRITIS FOUNDATION



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No one understands the ups and downs of arthritis better than those who live with it every day. Whether it's coping with chronic pain, navigating family or work life, managing stress or just getting through a tough day, the wisdom of others who've been there can make a real difference.

Here you will find practical advice, honest reflections and words of encouragement — straight from people with real experience. Their insights can help you take care of your body, your mind and your relationships, even when life throws you curveballs.



How do you de-stress during difficult times?

I make a concerted effort to stay in the present. Don't feel sad for the past, don't be afraid about the future. I tell myself: Right here, right now, I'm fine.

— **MAGGIE FRISCH**

A good book and a cup of tea.

— **KAREN FITCH**

Every night before bed, I write down three things I am looking forward to the next day. This helps me stay positive.

— **PATTY NEWMAN**

Lists, lists and more lists. Sometimes it's in a journal and sometimes it's just on a scrap of paper. Whether it is a to-do list, a list of worries or goals or just a food log, these lists give me a tangible way to measure my mood, my physical response to stress, and help me form thoughts so that I can talk to others in a meaningful way.

— **MARY PARSONS**

I use essential oils. I can't imagine my life without them now.

— **EMILY JACOBSON JOHNSON**

I've been meditating every morning and evening with the Headspace app. One of my best ways to de-stress is through my art. When I am in the midst of creating, I can just lose myself in the process and let go of my worries.

— **MAURA HIBBITTS**

I learn to take life easy when I have those bad days.

— **SAMPADA WAGLE**

I try to get outside. Any time in nature helps reduce stress and anxiety and increases happiness and clarity.

— **CHERIE GOSWICK**

Exercise. It's tough but I feel so proud of myself after a workout, and the release of endorphins definitely helps with stress and pain elimination!

— **SIMONA MURPHY**

I just began adult coloring! This has been relaxing, fun and takes the stress away.

— **DONNA OLIVER**

Crafting when the hands permit! And while doing that, music! It puts me smack in my happy place!

— **JEANE SMITH**

I choose my battles. Those things I can do nothing about, I don't stress over. I say a prayer.

— **ANITA HOPKINS**

My pugs help me keep the stress down.

— **KATHLYN MACFARLANE**

I love to sew and quilt. I can pick up something mindless if I'm feeling particularly stressed, or work on something more challenging when I want to refocus.

— **SYDNIE MCCONNELL**

Physical activity. It doesn't have to be anything strenuous, but getting up and going on a walk or stretching on the rug helps my stress level.

— **MARY PARSONS**

Heating pad, lying on the sofa and watching my soap opera.

— **ROBIN A. AUBUCHON**



How do you get through the workday?

Working from home. I spend my limited spoons on WORK instead of getting dressed, fixing my hair, putting on makeup, commuting.

— ANONYMOUS

I freely use all my adaptive tools — ice, pillows, stools to elevate feet/legs, medication, wrist splint, dictation, etc. To save my hands and energy, I lean on AI tools like ChatGPT to brainstorm, write and organize tasks. It's become my secret productivity partner — and helps me avoid burnout.

— LISA SHEPPARD

For real, remote work has changed my life for the better. It also exposes me to less germs.

— ANONYMOUS

I'm working from home full-time. I can take my time to wake up and get moving without the rush of getting ready for work. Working from home also gives me a lot of extra time with my dogs. Also, since I don't have a commute now, I'm always able to make it on time to my in-home yoga classes, which are really helpful to keep me feeling human.

— SYDNIE MCCONNELL

I designed a work environment with ergonomic seating, chair cushions for posture correction, ambient lighting and whimsical cat decor that makes working long hours less painful and more joyful.

— LISA SHEPPARD

Work in a comfortable position and in comfortable attire.

— ANONYMOUS

I try to do some exercise while sitting for long periods of time. Turning my feet in circles both directions, lifting my legs up and down, squeezing and releasing my muscles, lifting my heels up and down, clenching fists, stretching arms out, head from side to side, back and forward, getting up and walking up and down when possible, not sitting or standing for too long.

— CHRISTINE FRANKLIN



When it comes to family and friends, what suggestions do you have?

I use texts, Zoom, FaceTime and such to keep connected. I've also been sending out handmade cards with encouraging thoughts to people. My day gets a bit brighter when I can do something nice for another person.

— MAURA HIBBITTS

The best advice my mother-in-law gave me: You have arthritis. Don't let it have you.

— THERESA DOUGHERTY MCNALLY

There's a world of friends online. Just look on Twitter for #spoonies, #arthritis, #chroniclife, #rheum.

— JULIANNE BERRY

I keep my friends at a short distance — they know I love them, but they also know that a lot of the time I need to recover alone. I've learned that those who don't respect my boundaries aren't real friends, and that's reduced a lot of stress.

— KATIE LOUIS-TWITCH

Your friends, family, those relationships — it's not easy and it takes time. But once you are honest with yourself about your limits, it gets easier to communicate that with others.

— BRIANNA RAMOS

Don't be afraid to ask friends and family for help. Push yourself a little but learn when to say no. Be patient. You can do this.

— JENNIFER MANVILLE RAMONELL

A friend or family member may ask how they can help. Think of a list in advance so you're ready with concrete ideas. They really want to help, so give them something to do.

— JULIANNE BERRY

Don't be afraid to say no. Avoiding other people's disappointment isn't worth a flare. Trust me!

— KRISTIN JOY



What advice can you give for coping emotionally?

It's going to be OK. Not every day will be great, but also not every day will be terrible. And keep your doctors in the loop.

— **SINISTER BASSOON**

It's that inner monologue of knowing, "Well, I've been successful. I can be successful again."

— **ROB WICALL**

Be gentle with yourself. Talk about your feelings with folks who will not judge. Life doesn't have to come to a screeching halt. It will just change.

— **CASS**

Seek out mental health support. Even years into dealing with arthritis, you'll face new transitions [and challenges] and can benefit from the support and an impartial ear.

— **JULIANNE BERRY**

Understand that sometimes people won't understand what's going on, and that's OK. But take time for yourself.

— **ANNAH PYRA**

Stay busy. Don't sit and ruminate. Don't wish things were like they used to be. Don't catastrophize about what could happen in the future. Get up, get dressed, make a list of things to do, even if it's just going for a walk or a bike ride. Look forward to making a good dinner or watching a good movie. Realize how fortunate you are compared to a lot of people going through this.

— **MAGGIE FRISCH**

Don't underestimate yourself. Don't make excuses and give in.

— **ROB WICALL**

Get plugged into a support group and understand that everyone experiences their disease differently.

— **LAURA GENOVES**

Persevere, but not to a fault. Really learn to manage the disease, laugh and have fun when you can, and build your support system.

— **ANNIE LARSON**

Pray, get plenty of rest, be kind to people who will have to help you from time to time. Enjoy the "I can" moments and let go of the guilt and sorrow for the "I can't" moments.

— **ANONYMOUS**

You just can't give up on life. Find something you love, and do it while you still can!

— **LISA REINSTEIN**



What do you do to feel better when arthritis gets you down?

I go for a drive with my dog.

— JASON COCHRAN

I divorce my thinking from self-pity, then I try to do something for someone else. This works most of the time, but I am not above a waffle with ice cream and maple syrup or a chocolate bar either.

— ROGER HARTJE LORD

I have collected photos of things I love — my family, pets or events — in a scrapbook I call my Happy Scrappy. I take it out and look at it whenever I need a boost.

— PATTY NEWMAN

I give myself a 15-minute pity party, then I get back on meditation and expressing gratitude for what I do have.

— ANNIE LARS

I try to go for a bike ride every day. If I get enough exercise, I can sleep better. Then I feel better and then I lose weight. Win, win!

— JUDY SCOTT

I dance with my husband. I forget all about arthritis when I'm tripping the light fantastic!

— KATHY GELLER

If I can, I sit outside and watch the birds and wildlife.

— JO STARCHER

Talking out my feelings with my husband helps, and I'm grateful he's willing to listen. He's a lot more "zen" than I am and doesn't need to think out loud the way that I do.

— SUZY SZASZ PALMER

If I'm in a bad place, going out to dinner with a group of people gets me in my happy place because I'm out there enjoying life with people. Making other people happy makes me happy.

— ROB WICALL

What secrets do you have to stay active, or what advice would you give others?

I break my day into 90-minute sprints and walk between each one — even if it's just around the block. Movement isn't optional; it's medicine.

— **LISA SHEPPARD**

I've been making monthly goals, to help me feel like I can check a goal off as I'm working toward my yearly ones.

— **THATGIRLWITHARTHRITIS**

Stay physically strong! Keeping my weight down and working out daily with weights has been my saving grace.

— **KATERI MANNING HARKOWA**

Take up tai chi.

— **LAURA CULP ELLIOTT**

My morning walk is a must for me to clear my mind.

— **PATRICE JOHNSON**

Keep active. Inactivity increases the pain.

— **ALICE BEEMAN**

"Motion is the lotion" — from a wonderful physical therapist.

— **MINDY GOVAN**

I feel better when I get going, but making myself go for a walk is hard!

— **PAULINE TURNER**

Walk and get more exercise. Don't sit around and feel sorry for yourself.

— **TOM CYCHOSZ**

Try water aerobics and water PT.

— **LOIS CORRIGAN**

I do yoga.

— **MARY PALMER**

Exercise every day and stretch.

— **MARGE DANSER**

I do lots of weights. Stronger muscles defeated the pain of osteoarthritis in my right knee. I'm still weak and recovering, but I did my second half-marathon.

— **MARK VAN SCHEPDAEL**

Stretch and do physical therapy.

— **LORI JONES**

Keep exercising despite discomfort, as strong muscles support joints. Water exercise is gentle on joints. And never let anyone limit your view of your own potential.

— **ERIN REEVES MCMILLAN**

Instead of dreading PT, I treat it like brushing my teeth. I stretch, strengthen and use it as quiet time before diving into digital work.

— **LISA SHEPPARD**



I have to rest a lot due to other conditions, but to keep moving I do stretches and leg lifts while lying on my sofa and watching TV.

— **GAEL WEBSTER SUDBOROUGH**

Stop chasing strength. Instead, restore alignment and movement patterns first. Pain-free movement is the real foundation for long-term relief.

— **RENEE MOTEN**

I keep on moving almost daily knowing that the movement tends to lower the pain and gets my natural lubricants moving around. And I try to be gentle with myself on high pain days.

— **LOU GODWIN**

I go to the warm water pool and walk forwards, backwards, sideways and tread water. It feels great and strengthens my joints without pain.

— **LISA WINKLEBAUER BANE**

Taking my dog for a couple of short walks every day helps keep my joints moving. Then she will nap on the sofa with me.

— **ANN CORDELL YUNDT**



What lifestyle and attitude changes do you suggest for the long term?

Choose healthy food to eat, exercise daily, get enough sleep, reduce stress, be grateful for all that you have. Smile and enjoy life.

— **CHRISTINA DEWEY**

Know your limits and what your body can handle. It will be hard, but it will be better for you.

— **LEXI ELKS**

See something good in every day, and after a while you learn to live with the pain. Regarding the fatigue, listen to your body — don't do two hectic things on two days running. Learn to plan well.

— **NINA NANNY CHARBECK**

Be kind to your body and listen to it. Take time to deal with it and keep a positive attitude. Educate yourself so you know what you're dealing with.

— **SHILPI TALWAR**

Get plenty of rest. Talk to someone who will understand. Surround yourself with people who will help, not hurt you. Join support groups — it helps; they have great advice.

— **JEAN**

Don't make excuses for the pain you're in. There are good days and not-so-good days, and you owe it to yourself to take care of yourself.

— **CHERLYN**

It is important to listen to your body and rest when necessary. Maintain good nutrition, add some exercise and keep a positive attitude!

— **DONNA**

Eat more healthy foods. I've lost so much already that it feels really important that I don't lose my choice of what I eat.

— **ERIN REEVES MCMILLAN**

Not eating sugar of any kind.

— **CARYL SHADE**

You don't have to give in. Both my son and I are living our lives and we're not going to let this disease take us down.

— **ROB WICALL**

Being on a sleep schedule helps. Fatigue is the WORST symptom for me and can strike at any moment during the day.

— **JAMES CHORZEMPA**

Cut out processed foods. My pain, stiffness and mood have improved tremendously since cutting out processed food, and I am really enjoying what I eat.

— **BAPSY JONES**

The first thing is to be earnest about implementing an anti-inflammatory diet. I eliminated all of my pain prior to my hip replacement in January of 2021.

— **JOANNA CHODOROWSKA**



Have you found any silver linings to living with arthritis?

It has made me more compassionate and caring to others.

— ANITA KATZ

It's a journey that has brought my son and me closer together. We go to JA Camp together. We're going to JA Family Summit for the opportunity to find community.

— ROB WICALL

I appreciate the good days so much more. After a particularly bad flare day or week, I embrace the pain-free days.

— KAT STUBBS

I can't believe how kind and thoughtful others are. I never expected that — like the many people who ask me if I need help when I'm struggling to get my key into my building's door.

— MS. FREDA

If there is a silver lining, it would be that I have learned to like myself for who I am, not for what I can do.

— MAGGIE FRISCH

Learning there's more than one way to do almost anything.

— ANONYMOUS

I have become better at letting things go and realized that not everything has to be perfect.

— JEAN ROSE

I was always on the go, rushing from place to place. Now I embrace nature and find myself enjoying a much simpler life.

— SHARI MEDECK

I have learned to take better care of myself.

— ANDREA YOUNG

Living with arthritis has shown me how strong I am.

— RENA MEYERCHICK

Patience and naps, things I never had for myself.

— PAULO BERNARDINO

That even on my worst days, knowing someone else still has it worse.

— SCOTT BAILEY

I think the biggest silver linings in my story are the empathy, the ability to connect with people and some of the amazing people that I've met along my journey.

— SADIQ JIWA

I have met so many wonderful people. They have been so helpful.

— LISA REINSTEIN



It's **GREAT** *To Meet You*

We're so excited to have you in our community and can't wait to help you **Live Your Yes!**

Helpful Resources

To get started on your personal journey, we hope you'll take advantage of some of the many tools and resources designed for you. Here are a few to get you started.

- ▶ Join a **Connect Group** today to make connections and get information and resources to help you manage your pain.
- ▶ Have questions? Our licensed clinical staff is available to you to provide **one-on-one personal support**.
- ▶ **A variety of tools** are accessible online to help you reduce pain, promote your independence and live your best life.
- ▶ Ready to connect locally? Check out programs and **events in your area**.

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