

## About Arthritis Pain

Coping with chronic pain may be one of the hardest parts of having arthritis or a related condition. Pain can affect almost every aspect of life – work performance, the ability to complete daily tasks, getting quality rest and even personal relationships.

The first step toward taking control is knowing which type of arthritis pain you have and what causes it. That will help determine the way you and your health care team work together to manage your pain and protect your quality of life.

## Causes of Arthritis Pain

Identifying the cause of pain is key to managing it. Here are a few common causes:

- **Inflammation:** Normally, inflammation helps your body heal from injury, but with inflammatory conditions like rheumatoid arthritis, psoriatic arthritis, systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE, lupus), gout and ankylosing spondylitis, it can also cause pain. In these diseases, a faulty immune system or another factor releases chemicals that attack joints and other tissues, causing inflammation and pain.
- **Musculoskeletal Damage:** Structures in your musculoskeletal system – your joints, bones, muscles, cartilage, ligaments and tendons to name a few – can be damaged due to injury or wear and tear. This may cause arthritis pain and is common in osteoarthritis, back pain, tendinitis and bursitis.
- **Nerve or Centralized Pain:** This pain occurs when the central nervous system doesn't work properly. You may feel pain more strongly, and your ability to tolerate

## ✓ Factors That Worsen Pain

Several factors can affect the severity of arthritis pain, including:

- **Obesity.** Excess body fat may release inflammatory chemicals that cause osteoarthritis and worsen inflammatory conditions.
- **Age.** The severity and ability to manage pain may worsen with age.
- **Emotional State.** Stress, anxiety and depression can affect pain tolerance.
- **Comorbidities.** Having conditions like heart disease, diabetes and fibromyalgia can cause or increase pain.
- **Sleep Quality.** Arthritis pain impacts sleep quality, but poor sleep can worsen pain.

pain may be decreased. This commonly occurs with fibromyalgia but can happen with any form of arthritis pain.

## Treating Arthritis Pain

A comprehensive pain plan will likely draw from a range of solutions including:

- **Medications to Slow Disease Progression:** Medications that treat your disease may also help manage pain. These include disease-modifying antirheumatic drugs



## For More Information

**Arthritis Pain Management**  
[arthritis.org/pain](https://www.arthritis.org/pain)

**Breaking the Pain Chain**  
[arthritis.org/painchain](https://www.arthritis.org/painchain)

**Arthritis Foundation Help Line**  
**1-844-571-HELP (toll-free)**

(DMARDs). There are three classes of DMARDs: traditional, targeted, and biologics and biosimilars.

• **Medications to Treat Pain:** Over-the-counter and prescription medicines help treat your pain and other symptoms that contribute to your pain. These include NSAIDs (i.e., aspirin, naproxen, ibuprofen), acetaminophen, topical pain relievers, hyaluronic acid therapy, opioids and antidepressants.

• **Complementary and Emotional Health Therapies:** Touch and mind-body therapies (e.g., massage, meditation, biofeedback, acupuncture), emotional counseling and dietary supplements may help ease pain symptoms and improve coping abilities. You may also seek care from a physical therapist, chiropractor or occupational therapist who has specialized training to help you reduce pain, improve function and prevent or minimize disability.

• **Hot and Cold Therapy:** Cold constricts blood vessels to ease inflammation and swelling. It's best for pain caused by flares. Heat improves blood circulation and relaxes muscles to lessen aches and pains.

• **Lifestyle Changes:** Reaching and maintaining a healthy weight, exercising regularly, getting quality sleep and eating nutritious, anti-inflammatory foods can help ease your arthritis pain.

• **Surgery:** In some cases, partially or totally replacing a damaged joint can ease pain.

 **JOINT PAIN PROTECTION TIPS****Reducing stress on joints and pacing yourself can help with pain.**

- Use proper methods for bending, lifting, reaching, sitting and standing.
- Use assistive devices to put less stress on affected joints.
- Use your largest and strongest joints and muscles. Use your forearms to carry items and slide heavy items with your legs.
- Move or change positions often and take breaks throughout the day. Staying in one position too long may cause stiffness and pain.
- Ask for help with tasks that put added stress on painful joints.
- Practice strengthening exercises to maintain muscle development.

**FAQ****What are the best exercises for pain?**

Low-impact activities like swimming, walking, yoga and bike riding are best. You can even modify and practice these activities on painful days. But if you have more pain (not just sore muscles from exercise) two hours after exercise, you probably did too much. Scale back, but don't stop exercising. That will only make pain worse.

**How can I get a better night's sleep to help with pain?** Follow a regular bedtime schedule. To help you unwind at night, read a book, take a warm bath, meditate – anything that

helps take your mind off the pain. Avoid exercise, alcohol and caffeine a few hours before bedtime, and make your bed an electronics-free zone. Research shows that blue light interferes with sleep quality.

**Should I try a pain management center?**

If you've tried several treatments that have not worked, a pain management center can help you develop a comprehensive plan to treat all possible causes. Other helpful sources include support groups, professional counselors and cognitive behavioral therapists.