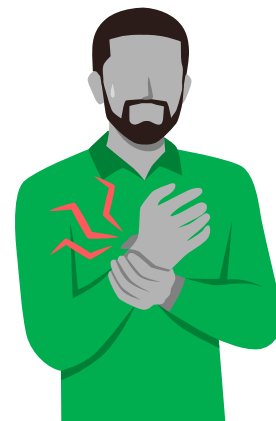


Managing Your Pain



About Arthritis Pain

Arthritis pain can be managed, and learning to understand it is the first step toward feeling better. Pain can affect daily activities, sleep, mood and even relationships, but knowing the type of arthritis pain you have and what triggers it can help you and your health care team develop a plan to control it. With the right strategies, treatments and support, you can protect your quality of life and continue doing the things that matter most to you.

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. With inflammatory diseases like rheumatoid arthritis and psoriatic arthritis, it can also cause pain.
- **Musculoskeletal Damage:** Your musculoskeletal system includes your joints, bones, muscles, cartilage, ligaments, tendons and more. Any of these can be damaged due to injury, genes and other factors, causing pain. This is common in osteoarthritis, back pain, and conditions like tendinitis and bursitis.
- **Centralized Pain:** This pain occurs when the central nervous system — the brain, brainstem and spinal cord — processes pain signals differently. People with this type of pain may feel sensations more intensely, making it harder to tolerate. While it is common in conditions like fibromyalgia, it can occur with any form of arthritis.

Treating Arthritis Pain

A well-rounded pain plan will draw from a range of solutions:

- **Medications to Slow Disease Progression:** Medications that treat your disease, known as disease-modifying antirheumatic drugs (DMARDs), could also help ease pain. There are different kinds of DMARDs, and they come in the form of pills, injections and IV infusions.
- **Medications to Treat Pain:** These are available over the counter and by prescription. They include:
 - Analgesics are used only to ease pain. Acetaminophen (Tylenol) is the most common. Others are opioid (narcotic) pain-relievers, which are effective but can be highly addictive.

JOINT PROTECTION TIPS

A physical and/or occupational therapist can show you proper ways to move your body and tips to reduce strain on joints. Joint protection strategies include:

- Pacing your activities so you can do things you want to do
- Using proper methods for bending, lifting, reaching, sitting and standing.
- Using assistive devices to put less stress on affected joints.
- Using your largest and strongest joints and muscles, like your legs instead of your back, and your forearms instead of hands and wrists.
- Move or change positions often and take breaks throughout the day.
- Ask for help with tasks that add stress or pressure on painful joints.
- Practice strengthening exercises to maintain muscles.

For More Information

Pain Management Resources
arthritis.org/pain

Arthritis Foundation Helpline:
800-283-7800
arthritis.org/helpline

- o Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as aspirin, naproxen and ibuprofen, come in pill form and in creams, gels and patches (topicals).
- o A corticosteroid shot into a painful joint eases pain in that joint for a while. Corticosteroid pills reduce body-wide inflammation and pain.
- o A hyaluronic acid injection into a painful joint relieves pain for some people.
- o Other drugs used for pain are certain antidepressants, which are helpful for fibromyalgia.
- **Self-management Through Lifestyle Changes:** You play a very important role in managing your pain. For example, it's important to reach and maintain a healthy weight and to get regular physical activity and quality sleep. Plus, taking time to relax or meditate and eating nutritious, anti-inflammatory foods may help ease arthritis pain. All these lifestyle changes will let you pursue goals that are valuable and meaningful to you.
- **Complementary Therapies:** In addition to your prescribed medicine, therapies like massage, meditation, biofeedback and acupuncture may help ease pain. Emotional counseling and certain supplements ease pain for many people and help them cope. Physical therapists, chiropractors and occupational therapists have specialized training to help reduce pain and improve how you move.
- **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.
- **Surgery:** In some cases, partially or totally replacing a damaged joint is needed to help relieve pain, especially in advanced osteoarthritis.

FAQs

What are the best exercises for pain?

Low-impact activities like swimming, walking, yoga and bike riding. You can adjust these activities to do them even on painful days. If you have joint pain two hours after exercise, scale back, but don't stop.

How can I get better sleep?

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 several hours before bedtime. And don't use your cell phone or other electronics; the light upsets sleep quality.

Should I try a pain clinic?

If nothing else has helped, a pain clinic might help you with a comprehensive pain treatment plan. But choose it carefully; it should offer options other than medications. Also try support groups, professional counselors and cognitive behavioral therapists.

What Worsens Pain?

Factors that affect how severe arthritis pain is include:

- **Obesity.** Extra weight can put more pressure on joints like the knees, hips, and ankles, and may contribute to inflammation. Even small changes in activity or weight management can make a difference.
- **Emotional State.** Stress, anxiety, fear, anger, guilt and depression can make it harder to tolerate pain.
- **Negativity:** The same areas of that process pain also process emotion. This means the way you respond to pain can make it better or worse. Next time you're in a bad mood, be gentle with yourself and coach yourself through it as you would a friend.
- **Additional Conditions.** Having heart disease, diabetes, fibromyalgia or another condition along with arthritis can increase pain.
- **Sleep Quality.** Arthritis pain worsens sleep quality, and poor sleep can make pain worse.