

ARE YOUR JOINTS UP FOR THE TASK?

Written by Joan Dobbie

Arthritis is an inflammation of the joints, surrounding tendons, ligaments, and cartilage. It can affect every part of the body, such as toes, feet, knees, hips, back, shoulders, arms, wrists, and fingers. When it becomes painful and limits motion, something has to be done to prevent or minimize serious damage.

About three million Canadians, one in ten, have osteoarthritis. Studies have shown that approximately 80% of the population over 50 years of age suffers from varying degrees of osteoarthritis. "The critical lack of access to orthopedic care is making life very difficult for thousands of Canadians," said Denis Morrice, president and chief executive officer of The Arthritis Society, in a recent interview.

As Canada's population not only grows but ages, demand for orthopedic care will become even greater. There will be more arthritis, osteoporosis, falls and fractures, and joint replacements. Musculoskeletal diseases cost the Canadian economy approximately eighteen billion dollars a year. Twenty thousand Canadians are currently waiting for knee and hip replacements. The wait averages more than six months nationwide. More than 37,000 hip and knee replacements are performed in Canada each year.

Adding activities such as walking and swimming to one's lifestyle helps to stabilize joints by increasing muscular strength and controlling weight. Excess weight can cause small tears in the cartilage upon impact. According to a recent University of Maryland School of Medicine study, a weight loss of 15 pounds resulted in a 50% decline in joint pain. A reducing diet is necessary for those with arthritis who are overweight.

A good treatment program for osteoarthritis includes visiting a naturopathic doctor and discussing a dietary supplement such as glu-cosamine hydrochloride which repairs damaged ligaments, cartilage, and tendons. Ask about herbal supplements such as devil's claw (anti-inflammatory), feverfew (pain killer), stinging nettle (detoxification), evening primrose oil (contains gamma linoleic acid), Jamaican dogwood, meadowsweet, willow bark, celery seed, prickly ash, wild yam, and alfalfa.

A blended liquid supplement, which addresses more than one symptom, has several advantages, ranging from cost savings to taking less pills to being better absorbed by the body. The absorption rate of a liquid dietary supplement is 60-70% compared to tablets at 10-20%.

Other things to consider are rest, special exercises, heat and cold treatments, and the use of self-help devices. Acupuncture also works well for arthritis. Although there is no cure, the process of the disease can be slowed, so it is important to get early, continuing naturopathic care. Reaching for ASA may create additional problems for the joints, and unwanted side effects.

Muscles around affected joints may become weak and affect the person's coordination and posture, so it is very important to have a regular exercise program to help maintain good muscle tone and strength. When muscles are weak, the weight-bearing joints must withstand more abuse, which leads to more inflammation and more pain. If muscles become painful, there are several natural remedies which can help to relax them, including kava, valerian, and St. John's wort.

Maintenance of strong bones will help to keep the joint tissue healthy. Dietary supplements, such

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as calcium with vitamin D or red clover, help one maintain adequate levels of calcium throughout the body. If you cannot tolerate dairy consider a liquid calcium plus vitamin D supplement.

Identifying possible food allergens and eliminating them from the diet is another option. Tests show that people with arthritis often have food sensitivities, which cause joint inflammation and pain.

Is chondroitin a magic bullet for arthritis? Studies to date have not been as extensive as those done with glucosamine. It is known that the molecular weight of chondroitin is 50,000, which is physically too large to pass through the lining of the gut. Most chondroitin is derived from beef trachea, raising concerns such as viral transmission. Glucosamine hydrochloride without chondroitin maintains joint mobility.

There are no quick fixes or fast cures for arthritis. The degeneration of joints takes many years to occur. Natural supplements can have gentle, positive, and beneficial effects over a period of four to six weeks. In some cases it may take a little longer. When you find a supplement that works for you then you can decrease a dependence on anti-inflammatory drugs and pain killers. Everyone is an individual and what works for one person may not work for another.

Joints in Motion Marathon

Joan Dobbie, RT, is a freelance science writer based in Halifax, NS who lives with arthritis. Joan is participating as a member of the Nova Scotian team in the upcoming Joints in Motion Marathon in Lausanne, Switzerland on October 21. Participants from cities across Canada will make up Team Canada. Each team member must raise a minimum of \$4800.00 in order to participate. Participants attending this year's marathon include a team from USA and teams from many European countries.

This annual Joints in Motion Marathon raises about 2.5 million dollars for The Canadian Arthritis Society to help fund research into a cure and prevention for arthritis. Money raised is also used at local branches of the Arthritis Society to supply educational material and patient services for those living with arthritis.

Joan has noticed a "marked improvement" in her arthritis since her training began in June. Walking, cycling, and swimming have become part of Joan's daily routine. In addition to her daily exercise, Joan takes a liquid herbal supplement containing glucosamine hydrochloride and three herbal extracts for painful or stiff joints.

If you wish to sponsor her for the half marathon (13.1 miles), she can be reached at (902) 429-4449.

References

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