

Can someone with osteoarthritis have a healthy active lifestyle?

Arthritis is one of the most common chronic health problems in Canada. There are many different forms of arthritis. It can affect the joints, ligaments, bones, and other parts of the musculoskeletal system. About 4 million Canadians have some form of arthritis, with numbers expected to double by 2020.

Osteoarthritis is one of the most common forms. With osteoarthritis, the shock-absorbing, smooth, gel-like cartilage between the bone joints gets worn down. This causes the bones to rub against one another. It can result in pain, inflammation, and physical disability.

Osteoarthritis is one of the major reasons why seniors limit their physical activity. It often affects:

- the end and middle joints of the fingers
- the joint at the base of the thumb
- hips
- knees
- the joints at the base of the big toe
- the neck or cervical spine.

What causes osteoarthritis?

There are several causes of osteoarthritis and several factors that can work in combination: These include:

- ageing
- having osteoarthritis in the family
- excess weight that puts increased stress on joints
- an earlier joint injury
- wear and tear
- complications and inflammation from other types of arthritis or other diseases
- defects in the joint structure.

Is there a cure?

There is no known cure for osteoarthritis. However, there is a wide range of medications aimed at relieving pain, preserving joint function, and limiting the progress of the disease.



Osteoarthritis can also be helped by:

- applying heat or cold to painful joints
- losing excess weight
- viscosupplementation -- a series of injections into the knee joints with hyaluronic acid
- surgery to repair, replace, remove, or realign severely damaged joints
- physical activity.

How does physical activity help?

When done properly, gentle movements of your affected joints can actually help to decrease osteoarthritis symptoms. Plus, being active makes you feel better overall. If you have osteoarthritis, it is even more important that you make a commitment to increasing your overall level of physical activity.

The secret is to recognize that you have a big role in the design, implementation and management of your exercise program. Get involved in the process by working with health care professionals on a plan tailored to your needs and abilities. Only you know your likes, dislikes, and motivation level.

When you feel empowered by your choices, physical activity can help you fight osteoarthritis.

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