

Men's Health Guide

Arthritis: Four Common Conditions

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FACT SHEET

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Staying healthy will help men do activities they enjoy well into retirement. Early detection and prevention of cancers specific to men, osteoporosis, and cardiovascular disease are topics in other lessons in the Men's Health Guide series. This lesson will focus on arthritis — specifically, osteoarthritis, gout, fibromyalgia, and rheumatoid arthritis.

Men and women generally view their health differently. Men are less likely to focus on symptoms and causes or how their overall health is affected. Men may also be less likely to establish routine health visits and assess symptoms before they become more pronounced. Men who learn to defend against illness and who are knowledgeable about assessing symptoms can possibly prevent disease or illnesses or lessen their effects on the body before they become serious health concerns.

Following your health care professional's recommendations is the best practice for your health care needs. This guide gives practical information to help men understand and defend against various types of arthritis. It provides a description of the four major types of arthritis, risk factors, diagnosis, and includes a healthy dietary pattern for arthritis.

Arthritis

Men with arthritis find that one or more of their joints is swollen, stiff, hard to move, and painful. Arthritis causes more work disabilities than any other health condition except heart disease. Nearly 19.1% of men of all ages had doctor-diagnosed arthritis in the United States from 2013 to 2015,



according to the CDC. Undiagnosed arthritis is thought to be much higher in men. More than 100 types of arthritis exist and the most common are osteoarthritis, gout, fibromyalgia, and rheumatoid arthritis.

Osteoarthritis is the most common form of arthritis. Also called degenerative joint disease, it occurs most frequently in the hands, hips, and knees and is caused by extensive wear and tear on the joints.

Gout is a common form of inflammatory arthritis that is very painful and usually affects one joint at a time, often the big toe joint. Repeated bouts of gout can lead to gouty arthritis, a worsening form of arthritis. While there is no cure for gout, it can be managed with medication and self-care strategies to prevent future flares and kidney stones.

Fibromyalgia is a condition that causes chronic body pain, sleep and fatigue problems, and emotional and mental distress. People with fibromyalgia may be

more sensitive to pain. Fibromyalgia affects about 2% of the adult population. While the cause of fibromyalgia is not known, it can be treated and managed through pain relievers, aerobic and strengthening exercises, stress management, quality sleep, treatment for depression, and knowledge about the condition.

Women are more likely to be diagnosed with fibromyalgia than men at a rate of 4:1 all the way up to 9:1 in some studies. Underdiagnosis may be caused by differences in symptoms or lack of knowledge about fibromyalgia. As awareness increases, more males may be willing to seek out medical help.

Rheumatoid arthritis is an autoimmune and inflammatory disease. The immune system attacks healthy cells by mistake, causing inflammation in the affected parts of the body, mainly joints in the hands, wrists, and knees. The lining of the joint becomes inflamed, causing damage to joint tissue, which can in turn cause long-lasting or chronic pain, unsteadiness, and deformity.

Rheumatoid arthritis can also affect other tissues throughout the body and cause problems in organs such as the lungs, heart, and eyes.

Risk Factors

- Injury of or overuse and repetitive stress on a joint can cause damage and increase the risk of arthritis in that joint.
- Age increases the risk of developing arthritis.
- Women are more likely to develop osteo- or rheumatoid arthritis or fibromyalgia but men are more likely to develop gout.
- Being overweight puts more stress on weight-bearing joints like the hips and knees.
- People who have family members with arthritis are more likely to develop arthritis.
- Osteoarthritis incidence can be lower for some Asian populations.

Diagnosis

Arthritis is diagnosed by reviewing symptoms, conducting a physical examination, and doing X-rays and lab tests. Each form has a little different process. It's best to diagnose rheumatoid arthritis early to slow or stop damage from the disease. Gout can only be diagnosed when a flare up occurs and the joint becomes hot, swollen, and painful. Tests show uric acid crystals in the affected joint. Talking to your healthcare provider when symptoms first appear, especially for rheumatoid arthritis, is important for early detection and to lessen progression of this form of arthritis.

Tips for arthritis health

Learning strategies to better manage your arthritis can help you feel more in control of your health, manage pain and other symptoms, reduce stress, improve your mood, and carry out daily activities, like going to work and spending time with loved ones. Communicating with your health care provider about your care will help you better manage your arthritis.

Arthritis is usually managed through moderate physical activity, healthy eating, weight reduction, medication, surgery, and other therapies. Diet and nutritional supplements can help relieve the symptoms of osteoarthritis, gout, and rheumatoid arthritis.

People who are overweight or obese can reduce stress on joints by losing 10 to 12 pounds. Following a healthy dietary plan (explained in the next section) and walking can help you lose weight. Participate in activities that you enjoy and that are easier on the joints such as walking, swimming, water aerobics, or riding a bike. Remember to start slow, move gently, keep the impact low, and increase activity over time. Physical activity not only helps your joints but has other health benefits such as helping maintain bone strength, improve sleep, weight control, improve balance, and enhance your overall quality of life. Talk with your health care provider or physical therapist to decide which activities are best for you.



Balance the calories you eat with your physical activity. Take a load off your joints by losing excess fat. Each pound of weight lost will result in a 4-pound reduction in the load exerted on your knees per step during your daily activities. Since you take thousands of steps each day, a small reduction in your body weight will add up to big benefits for your joints.

Choosing a Healthy Dietary Pattern

Following a healthy dietary pattern can benefit the health of all individuals and may help prevent or lessen the risk of some types of arthritis. Focus on eating nutrient-dense foods and drinking low-fat milk and non-sugary beverages.

Nutrient-dense foods provide vitamins and minerals, and have no or little added sugars, saturated fat, and sodium. The core elements that make up a healthy dietary pattern include:

- Eat a variety of vegetables such as dark green; red and orange; beans, peas, and lentils; starchy and other vegetables.
- Select whole fruits, frozen, or canned fruit packed in 100% juice or water, not syrup.

- When selecting grain products make at least half of them whole grains.
- Choose fat-free or low-fat milk, yogurt, and cheese, and/or lactose-free versions and fortified soy beverages as alternatives in the dairy group.
- Protein foods should include lean meats, poultry, and eggs; seafood; and protein alternatives such as beans, peas, lentils, nuts, seeds, dairy, and soy products.
- Limit saturated fats by selecting oils that are unsaturated or liquid, like olive oil, vegetable oils, and healthy fats found in seafood, avocados, and nuts.
- Reduce the amount of sodium (salt) in your diet.
- Drink alcohol in moderation.
- Reduce foods with high or added sugars.

Citrus fruits, cruciferous vegetables, foods high in omega-3 fats, and the minerals zinc and selenium may help reduce rheumatoid arthritis inflammation. These nutrients should come from foods and not supplements as more research is needed before dietary supplements can be recommended for arthritis.

- Citrus fruits include oranges, tangerines, grapefruits, lemons, and limes.
- Cruciferous vegetables include arugula, bok choy, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, collards, kale, kohlrabi, mustard greens, radishes, rutabaga, turnips, turnip greens and watercress.
- Omega-3 fats are found in cold-water fish, flaxseed, canola oil and walnuts.
- Good dietary sources of zinc are oysters, zinc-fortified cereals, baked beans, beef, crab and lamb.

- Good food sources of selenium include nuts, liver, fish, shrimp, tuna, whole grains, rice, turkey, and chicken.

Summary

Your health is important. Taking steps to prevent, detect, and care for yourself now will help you lead a healthier, more fulfilling life. Your family and friends depend on you and want you to be healthy. Creating and sticking with just a few healthier habits will give you benefits to better manage or relieve your arthritis symptoms. Early treatment is key to preventing additional damage, and living a healthier lifestyle may allow you to live a long healthy life, doing the things you enjoy well into retirement.

References:

Arthritis Types | CDC, www.cdc.gov/arthritis/basics/types.html

Arthritis Foundation, www.arthritis.org

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