

Joint Pain

by Admin

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Common Causes of Joint Pain

It has been estimated that more than 40 million Americans have joint pain, also called arthralgia, of one kind or another. Joint pain occurs where two bones meet. The most common areas of joint pain are the knees, ankles, wrists and knuckles, although it can occur at any joint. While there are common causes for joint pain, many people do not know what those causes are.

* Physical injury is one of the most common causes for joint pain. Normally this occurs when a joint is twisted or there is heavy impact on the joint. You may also see joint injury related to sprains or strains. Torn tendons,

overstretched ligaments and bone fractures can also affect joints. Whenever joints are dislocated, pain will also be present.

* Overuse can also be the cause of joint pain. The condition chondromalacia patella, which is the degeneration of cartilage under the kneecap, is something adolescents and young adults may experience.

* Arthritis is what most people think of when anyone mentions joint pain. There are around 100 forms of arthritis. The two most common – osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis – affect nearly 20 million people each year. Other forms of arthritis are gout, septic and reactive.

* Sarcoidosis and Lupus, both autoimmune diseases, affect the joints. Lupus causes inflammation in the joints but can also affect the blood cells, kidneys, lungs, heart and skin. Sarcoidosis is the growth of small lumps, called granulomas, which can occur throughout the body. Common areas affected are the lungs and lymph nodes but doctors at the May Clinic believe this condition also causes joint pain in the hands, wrists, elbows and ankles.

* Chronic illnesses or infectious diseases such as Lyme disease, measles, mumps, rheumatic fever and Epstein-Barr can also affect joints. Rubella, or German measles, chickenpox and mononucleosis can also cause joint pain even though that is not the main effect of the disease.

* Rickets, which is from a lack of vitamin D, is another cause of joint pain. This disease is not as common in the United States as in other parts of the world but can cause joint pain or bone softness.

* Bursitis and tendonitis are also conditions affecting the joints. Bursitis, caused by swelling of the bursae found between the tendons and skin, can cause severe pain, especially when a person is active. Tendonitis, which is inflammation of the tendons connecting bones and muscles, also causes painful joints. This commonly affects the tendons in the heel, shoulder or wrists.

* Osteoporosis, where the bones become porous, can also cause joint pain.

* Bone cancer, the growth of abnormal cells in the bones, may either originate in the bone itself or spread to them. In either case, the pain associated with bone cancer can be excruciating.

If you experience joint pain, you may not know the cause. This is why visiting your primary physician is so important. They will be able to determine the cause of your joint pain and prescribe ways for you treat it so your joint pain does not adversely affect your life.

Documenting and Measuring Your Pain

When you first start having stiffness and pain in your joints, you want to take something to ease the pain and go on with your life. Unfortunately, as the pain becomes more and more regular, you realize something more serious may be happening. You call the doctor to see if you have arthritis. Before you have your appointment, documenting and measuring your pain so you can take it to the doctor will help them understand and make a proper diagnosis.

Keeping a symptom diary, when you first notice pain you think may be arthritis, will be invaluable for your doctor. It will also help your doctor recognize the type of arthritis you may have. There are over 100 types of arthritis; this information will help you receive the proper treatment. Here are some things you may want to consider when documenting and measuring your pain:

* Where does the pain begin? Does it start in the joint itself and radiate out? Alternatively, does the pain begin in the muscles surrounding the joint without affecting the joint itself?

* Do you have only one joint with pain or is more than one joint affected?

* Is the pain associated with stiffness or is there simply pain?

* Is the pain worse in the morning and then it “works itself out” as the day progresses?

* How severe is the pain? Can you give it a rating between 1 and 10, with 10 being the worst pain you have ever experienced?

Your doctor will also ask you if your pain interferes with your quality of life and to what degree. Quite likely, your pain intensity will change from day to day.

Tracking your symptoms and pain each day will help tremendously. Not only will you see what activities make your pain worse, you can also see a pattern if foods you eat affect it. Each of these items will assist your doctor in their diagnosis and choice of treatment:

* Your activity level – Some types of arthritis will improve when you move. Others will become worse with activity. Therefore, it is important to record what type of activity level you had leading up to the pain.

* Barometric pressure – No one fully understands how or why weather affects arthritis pain, but recognize the fact it does. Higher barometric pressure (good weather) will cause little to no arthritis pain. On the other hand, low barometric pressure (bad weather) makes arthritis pain considerably worse. Write down what the weather was like leading to your pain and on the day you experienced it.

* Foods can also make a difference in arthritis pain. Some foods will make it worse, such as red meat, tomatoes and alcohol, and others will make it better, such as salmon, walnuts, vitamin C-rich foods and spices like turmeric and ginger. Pay attention to what foods you have eaten when arthritis flares up.

* Your weight is the final thing to track. Whereas gaining weight will make arthritis pain worse, losing it can make it feel much better.

Find documents to help you measure your pain by going to partnersagainstpain.com or other websites. Having a pre-created document on which to track your pain will make documenting and measuring your pain easier. When you have an appointment with your doctor, be sure to take the document or journal with you.

Is It Arthritis?

Arthritis is the name given to over 100 different conditions that cause joint pain and tenderness. Even though arthritis affects over 86 million Americans, aches and pains in the joint may be something other than arthritis. Another condition could be to blame for the pain. How do you know if it is arthritis or if it is something else?

The main symptoms of arthritis are:

- * Pain
- * Stiffness
- * Inflammation
- * Damage to cartilage
- * Joint weakness
- * Visible deformities
- * Instability of the joint

Many illnesses have similar symptoms so it is often necessary to seek a doctor's diagnosis to know for sure if your pain is from arthritis or another condition.

Tendonitis is one non-arthritis cause for joint pain. Think about “tennis elbow” or pain in the shoulders, knees, hips or wrists. Since both conditions cause pain with movement and tenderness in the area, it is no wonder people often confuse tendonitis with arthritis. You can tell the difference if you have had a recent injury to the tendons as well as pain occurring over a larger area. Arthritis is centralized in the joint.

Fibromyalgia is a syndrome that affects tender points such as shoulders, hips, back, arms and legs. These same joints are also affected by arthritis. Fibromyalgia pain, however, extends past the joints. Doctors do not fully understand this condition, but they can give you a proper diagnosis.

Many people experience achiness in the joints when they have the flu. Over-the-counter pain relievers can treat this type of pain, but you will want to know for sure what the cause is. Flu, caused by a virus, also has symptoms of fever, chills, headache and cough. Even though the two are similar concerning joint pain, you will get over the flu quickly whereas you may live with chronic pain from arthritis for years.

One type of arthritis often treated as a separate condition is gout. This condition, characterized by pain, swelling and inflammation of the joints, often affects the big toe. Unlike other forms of arthritis, gout is not caused from overuse or an immune disorder. Instead, excessive uric acid in the blood is the cause. To treat gout, doctors recommend patients cut back on eating organ meats, seafood and drinking beer. Changes to the diet can prevent future attacks.

Carpal tunnel syndrome can also be mistaken for arthritis. This condition occurs when the “tunnel” for the ligaments and nerves are constricted which leads to pain, tingling and numbness in the fingers. Repetitive motions such as typing and some hobbies are believed to be the cause of carpal tunnel syndrome. Once properly diagnosed, a doctor will recommend surgery to correct it or will prescribe use of a splint to help relieve the pain.

If you begin experiencing pain in your joints on a regular basis, arthritis may be the culprit. Before you decide you have arthritis, consider these other conditions with painful joints as a symptom. Of course, your doctor is the only one who can properly diagnose what is causing your pain. The sooner you make an appointment, the sooner you will know what you have and how to treat it.

Lifestyle Changes for Better Joint Care

Sometimes, no matter how well you take care of yourself, you will begin to feel aches and pains affecting your joints. You may be experiencing joint pain now. If you follow some or all of these lifestyle changes for better joint care, you may begin to notice that joint pain is soon only a memory.

If your family has a history of joint pain, you may not be able to avoid it. However, your lifestyle and the things you do can greatly influence how much joint pain you experience. Which of these changes can you make to improve your own joint health?

* Carrying extra weight can be part of the cause of joint pain or at least aggravate it. For each 10 pounds of body weight, your body experiences an extra 30 to 70 pounds of pressure on joints in the feet, ankles and knees with each step you take. If you decide to start running, the extra weight increases dramatically.

* Start doing non-impact exercises. Walking, swimming or water aerobics, yoga and bicycling are exercises that will not put undue stress on your joints. Not only will exercising help you lose weight, it also releases endorphins that ease pain as well as improve your mood. You can relax if you think you will have to spend hours in the gym. Research has shown that only 30 minutes of exercise each day can ease the pain of arthritis.

* Be aware of your posture as you sit, stand and walk. Proper posture can make a huge difference in preventing unneeded stress on your spine and lower back. It also reduces neck strain.

* If you spend much time on the computer, besides being aware of your posture, it would also help to move your keyboard forward to reduce strain on your shoulders, arms and neck. Using a keyboard rest, orthopedic chair or other device might also make your time in front of the computer less damaging to your joints.

* Get up and move around during the day if you have a sedentary job. If you simply cannot get away from your desk, stand up to stretch or bend over to touch your toes. Doing some type of stretching throughout the day will keep you supple.

* Use non-medication methods to help you control pain. Rather than reaching for painkillers, try a massage instead. Herbal baths can also be helpful in reducing pain. A number of herbs can be taken as a capsule or a tea that have pain-relieving qualities.

* Eat a healthy diet. People often do not realize how what they eat can affect their health. Add more fresh fruits and vegetables to your diet while reducing high-calorie, high-fat choices. Reports indicate certain foods can reduce joint pain. These foods include salmon due to the omega-3 fatty acids, extra virgin olive oil for the polyphenols it contains, as well as ginger and turmeric because they have anti-inflammatory properties.

If you have experienced pain lately, these small lifestyle changes can have an impact on how your joints feel. Decide which change you want to make first and see how this one change can reduce the pain you feel.

Pill-Free Pain Relief

When you are in the throes of pain, all you want is relief. For most, this means reaching for an over-the-counter painkiller. Others prefer to find pill-free pain relief but aren't sure where to find it. Below are some options you may want to consider the next time you're in pain.

Acupuncture is a form of therapy used in traditional Chinese medicine. Very thin, sterile needles are placed just under the skin on specific points of the body. Studies show that acupuncture is effective in treating up to 100 conditions including chronic pain. While acupuncture hasn't always been accepted in Western medicine, more doctors have referred patients to acupuncturists than any other "alternative" medicine available today.

Massage therapy is another pain-free pain relief. Think about it - when you have a headache, what do you instinctively do? You rub your temples or the area that it hurts. Massage therapists are knowledgeable not only of massage techniques but also human physiology, so they know the right muscles to massage to get the most pain-relieving benefit.

Mind-body techniques are also used to treat pain without resorting to pills. Techniques like relaxation, biofeedback, guided imagery and meditation help those suffering from pain effectively. Another type of mind-body therapy is Tai Chi, a Chinese martial art that combines deep breathing and slow, fluid movements. While there have not been studies regarding using Tai Chi specifically for pain, it improves general overall health and mood.

History shows that people have used herbs to treat pain for thousands of years. Herbs that have anti-arthritis properties include black cohosh, dandelion, devil's claw, juniper, feverfew, meadowsweet, white willow, rosemary and turmeric. While you can take these herbs in capsule form, they are also used in herbal teas, tinctures and salves.

Hot or cold therapy can be used to treat arthritis pain. Normally either ice (or a bag of frozen vegetables) or a heating pad are placed on the painful area. It is important to remove the treatment after 20 minutes but it can be repeated two to three times daily.

Losing weight can also help reduce pain. What most people don't realize is that every extra 10 pounds of body weight is 30 to 70 extra pounds of pressure on your knees, ankles and feet each time you take a step. Along with reducing pain, losing weight will also improve your health in other ways.

Amazingly, even the foods you eat can help you fight pain. Adding whole grains to your diet is not only healthy for the fiber it contains but also for the magnesium, which aids in fighting muscular pain. You probably know salmon has omega-3 fatty acids but it also contains vitamin D, which helps fight pain. Olive oil is rich in antioxidants that can block pain-causing mechanisms in the body. Ginger and turmeric both contain several substances that contain pain-relieving properties.

No one wants to feel pain, but it does happen on occasion. If you don't like taking pills, try one or more of these pill-free pain relief options.

Questions to Ask Your Doctor

Arthritis pain affects more than 86 million people each year. Adults, teenagers and even children can be affected by it. If you think you may have one or more forms of arthritis, here are some questions to ask your doctor during your next appointment.

* At least 100 different illnesses that fall under the name "Arthritis," so which one do I have? This may seem like a silly question, but the treatment can be radically different depending upon what type of arthritis you have.

* What is the best medication for the type of arthritis I have? Doctors can treat mild osteoarthritis with over-the-counter medications, while rheumatoid arthritis needs a prescription to reduce the effects of the disease.

* How much does my family history or my own medical history affect which drugs I can take? Your doctor should ask for a complete family medical history as well as your own to ensure there is not a problem with the drugs they want to prescribe.

* Is this drug safe to take every day? In the same vein, you will want to ask if you will have to take the drug long term. Some medications can be taken for a short time and still be effective. Others may require that you take them for longer to get the most benefit from them.

* How long will it take to see an improvement in my arthritis symptoms? Depending upon the type of arthritis you have, you may see an improvement in pain in less than a week. Other medicines may take longer for you to see progress.

* Will I have to worry about this treatment interacting with other medications I am currently taking? Drug interaction can have serious consequences so it is imperative that you tell your doctor every prescription you have, any over-the-counter medications you may take and any herbal remedies you may use.

* If the prescription has potential side effects, is there something I can do to reduce the possibility of developing them? If you have ever read the materials that come with a prescription, you know some of the side effects can be worse than the condition for which you take the medication. Asking the doctor about side effects and reducing your risk for them helps your doctor know that you are informed and knowledgeable about your condition.

* Are there other options I can use to reduce my pain without having to take

painkillers? What are my risks if I choose not to go that route, but use a “natural” method to treat my arthritis instead? Most doctors will try to convince you to use the form of treatment they are most familiar with and prescribe most often. Remember that this is your body and you have the right to refuse treatment if you feel there is something better available. Take the time to research the different types of arthritis and possible treatments so you can discuss things with your doctor in an informed manner.

Arthritis inflammation and pain can range from mildly irritating to debilitating. Seeking the advice of a licensed professional – whether you choose a traditional doctor or a naturopathic doctor – is your best bet to learn if you have arthritis and the treatments that are available. If a doctor diagnoses you with arthritis, do your best to learn all you can and seek a second opinion if you are uncomfortable with the prescribed course of action.

Taking Advantage of Your Natural Endorphins

Joint pain from arthritis can be frustrating. When you are in the throes of a flare-up, you want the pain to end and vow you will do anything to make that happen. What you may not realize is that exercising regularly is one way to reduce the pain. Learn more about taking advantage of your natural endorphins and see what a difference it can make.

Doctors will stress how important it is to exercise regularly. When you have arthritis, however, not all types of exercise are recommended. Ask your doctor which exercises are best for you to do or see if the doctor will set up an appointment with a physical therapist to learn how to exercise safely with arthritis.

Research shows that normal, light exercise can be effective to achieve joint pain relief. What type of exercises should you do? Try one or more of these to

relieve joint pain and stiffness:

* Hydrotherapy is exercise you do in lukewarm water. The movements, with the resistance of the water, strengthen muscles and tendons surrounding the joint. It also helps relax the joints. Since you do the exercises in the water, you do not have the stress and pressure on the joints that you would experience with other exercises.

* Yoga is another exercise you can do that will help reduce arthritis pain and relax the mind. Yoga makes the muscles more flexible and able to protect the joints. Thousands use Yoga on a regular basis to reduce joint pain and stiffness.

Obviously, you can do other exercises as well. However, it is important to listen to the cues your body sends you. If you start having pain in the joints while exercising, stop immediately.

You may have heard of the “runner’s high,” the state of euphoria a runner gets while running. What they are experiencing is a rise in the endorphin level. Endorphins are chemicals in the brain called neurotransmitters. The purpose of the neurotransmitter is to transmit electrical signals within the body’s nervous system.

What most people do not know is that endorphins interact with receptors in the brain to reduce our perception of pain. Research shows the endorphins act much the same way a drug like codeine or morphine would act on the body. Thankfully, endorphins are natural and, while you may be tempted to exercise more to get that sense of euphoria, endorphins are non-habit forming.

Doctors cannot tell you how many endorphins your body will produce since each person is different. You will have to experiment with how intense and how long you exercise to determine when endorphins kick in. You may also see an increase of endorphins for non-exercising activities. Acupuncture, massage therapy, meditation and sex will all increase endorphin levels to a degree.

Another benefit of exercise, besides the obvious reduction in pain and the benefits to your overall health, is how exercise can affect you psychologically. The same endorphins that help with pain relief will also reduce the effects of depression. As you can see, it is possible to take advantage of your natural endorphins and reduce the pain you feel.

Tips for Living with Chronic Pain

Nearly 86 million people in the Unites States suffer from some type of chronic pain each year. What is chronic pain? It is pain that continues even with medical therapy. It may last months or years after an illness or injury. Some people experience chronic pain despite the fact neither injury or illness are an issue.

One thing that those living with chronic pain have to deal with is added emotional and physical stress. They may find that they experience depression, anxiety and anger. Lowered immunity and increased risk for other health conditions are also possible.

Some things you may be able to do to help you live with chronic pain include the following:

- * Learn mind-body therapy techniques that help you relax through deep breathing, guided imagery and positive self-talk.
- * Join a chronic pain support group. You may also want to look for an American Pain Society meeting. Your doctor or local hospital would be a good place to begin seeking for these meetings.
- * Reduce or eliminate alcohol consumption. You may already experience

disruption in your sleep with the pain; drinking alcohol could make this issue worse.

* Smoking is another habit you will want to quit. Not only does cigarette smoking impair healing, it can also increase risk factors associated with other diseases.

* If you are overweight, losing weight can help tremendously. Reports state that even an extra ten pounds can feel like an extra 60 pounds with each step you take.

* To help with weight loss, some people adjust their diet. Did you realize eating a healthy diet could also help you live with chronic pain? Eat a diet that is low in fat, low-sodium and full of fresh fruits and vegetables. Adding certain foods, such as peaches, cauliflower, oranges, ginger and turmeric, may help reduce pain. Some studies also recommend cutting back on processed foods, gluten and milk.

* Some people suffering from chronic pain believe that exercise will cause more pain. Actually, the opposite is true. While you exercise, your body produces endorphins. These chemicals, produced in the brain, help block pain signals as well as improve your mood. Your doctor will be able to recommend the best exercise program for the pain you experience.

* Know how to track your pain level and which activities cause it to increase. Not only will this help you see the connection between activities and pain, it will also help your doctor. Some people keep a pain log while others keep a journal. A number of places online offer free pain diaries.

* Massage therapy can help reduce pain by affecting the amount of tension you experience. Massage can help with chronic pain no matter where it hurts the most.

If you are one of the millions of people living with chronic pain, it is important

to acknowledge your pain and then take control of it with your doctor's help. Work closely with your doctor to learn as much as you can; using some of these tips for living with chronic pain may also help.

When to See Your Doctor for Joint Care

People often begin to experience joint pain after an injury or as they get older. However, what do you do if you experience pain without having received an injury to a joint, or you experience joint pain unexpectedly? You want to know whether to see your doctor for joint care or whether it is all right to treat your pain with over-the-counter painkillers. Keep reading to learn how to tell the difference.

Obviously, you will want to pay attention when you begin experiencing any type of pain, whether in the joints or elsewhere. However, there is much you can do at home before deciding to call the doctor.

- * You could try soaking the affected joint in warm water. This will reduce swelling and reduce pain.
- * Gently massage the joint and the area surrounding the joint. This gentle stimulation may return flexibility to the joint and ease the pain somewhat.
- * Avoid repetitive activities that may be causing the joint pain.
- * Regularly and gently, stretch muscles and tendons to reduce painful joints.
- * Take an over-the-counter pain reliever and see how quickly the pain returns.
- * Keep a journal about the pain in your joints so you will have everything you need if you do go see your doctor.

Some joint pain is to be expected. There may have been an injury, illness affecting the joints or simple wear and tear. This can be normal; however, your joint pain may also be the sign of an infection or arthritis. Consider the following when deciding if it is time to see your doctor.

- * If you experience pain in your joints that is unexplained and appears with no warning, it is best to seek an appointment with your doctor.
- * The joint is swollen, warm to the touch, red and tender.
- * Pain in the joint persists for three or more days without abating.
- * You are experiencing joint pain and a fever but have not recently had the flu.
- * You have lost weight without trying to do so and experience joint pain.

If any of the following occur, it is best to head directly to the emergency room:

- * You have received a serious injury to the joint.
- * The joint appears deformed or misshapen.
- * Swelling occurs suddenly.
- * You cannot move the joint at all.
- * The pain in the joint is severe.

Once you have decided to go see the doctor or go to the emergency room, be prepared to provide information about how the pain feels – deep, on the surface, in one spot or all over.

Doctors will also want to know which joints are the most painful, if there are other symptoms associated with the pain like feeling as if the joint will give way, and how long you have had the pain. The doctor will also ask you how the pain affects your daily life and whether it keeps you from doing what you would normally do.

Will Physical Therapy Help?

When you have arthritis, you may have a little bit of joint pain and stiffness or you may have a lot. No matter how intense your pain, you may wonder if physical therapy will help. In most cases, the answer will be yes.

Part of the reason why people with arthritis have joint stiffness is because they avoid movements that can make it hurt more. The problem is that NOT moving causes the pain to get worse. This is why physical therapy will help, because a therapist can teach you how to move and work out the stiffness without causing further damage. However, the way physical therapy is most beneficial is after a fall or another type of injury, or right after having some type of joint surgery.

One way physical, or occupational, therapy can help most is by teaching you to learn how to move so you will reduce the strain on your joints. Therapists can teach you how to make simple changes to your home, work and life to make arthritis less of a problem. This may also include using aids such as zipper pullers, grippers to reach for items on shelves or other assistive devices. The therapist will be able to offer advice to make day-to-day activities easier and less painful for you.

Physical therapy can be beneficial to teach you about the type of arthritis you have. The more you know about what ails you, the better prepared you are to make necessary changes. Most often, a physical therapist will recommend that you lose weight if necessary because carrying extra weight can make arthritis pain worse in your back, leg, hip and feet joints. They will also be able to teach you about relieving pain naturally and/or with medication. Modified activities may also be part of your therapy so you can improve your daily life without pain.

How do you know if physical therapy is right for you? Your doctor will be the best person to speak with concerning starting physical therapy. If they feel it is a valid option, they will work closely with a physical therapist to design a program of treatment just for you. Of course, they will also want your input to be able to determine what you think you can do and help you set realistic goals.

If you do begin physical therapy, a therapist will design a program of exercises to help you reduce pain and stiffness in your joints. However, it is also important to increase muscle strength surrounding the joints, which will help to

stabilize them. Flexibility, balance, coordination and endurance exercises may also be included. With your limitations taken into consideration, the therapist will assess your ability and teach you how to perform range-of-motion exercises that will help you live your life without the problems associated with arthritis.

Is physical therapy always the solution for someone suffering from arthritis pain? The truth is, physical therapy is not always the answer. It can help those who have developed arthritis after an injury or those who have had joint replacement surgery. It may not be the best choice for someone with mild arthritis. People who have a milder case of arthritis may be able to ease the pain and stiffness with heat and cold therapy or over-the-counter pain relievers.

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