



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Sit and Suffer or Move and Mend

Arthritis Awareness Month — May 2008

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[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC — safer, healthier people.

[Dr. Gaynes] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the MMWR, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes.

When arthritis pain kicks in, the last thing on your mind is exercise. But according to the Surgeon General, the best thing you can do for those aching joints is use them. Moderate physical activity has proven to be the most effective way to relieve pain, strengthen joints, and improve the use of areas affected by arthritis.

Dr. Jennifer Hootman is a researcher with CDC's National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. She's joining us today to discuss ways to relieve the pain caused by arthritis. Welcome to the show, Jennifer.

[Dr. Hootman] Thank you.

[Dr. Gaynes] Jennifer, how prevalent is arthritis in the United States?

[Dr. Hootman] Arthritis is actually one of the most common chronic diseases. It affects one in five adults and about 300,000 children.

[Dr. Gaynes] Clearly, arthritis occurs mostly among older adults. Is the condition preventable or is it just a natural part of the aging process?

[Dr. Hootman] Arthritis can occur among people of all ages, but it is more common among older adults. It is not a normal part of the aging process, as not everyone gets arthritis. There are a couple things that people can do to reduce their risk of arthritis. Overweight and obesity is associated with a higher prevalence of arthritis. Maintaining a normal body weight will help lower your risk of getting arthritis. The other big risk factor for arthritis is joint injury, whether it comes from occupation or sports and recreation or just accidents. Protecting your joints from joint injury can reduce your risk of getting arthritis.

[Dr. Gaynes] Once a person begins to develop arthritis, is there treatment?

[Dr. Hootman] There is. Most people think there is nothing you can do for arthritis, but there's actually quite a few things that people can do themselves. One is get education about the disease. Learn what you can do to help prevent complications and becoming disabled or losing function from the disease. We call that self-management education. The other thing is to get appropriate physical activity, and that actually helps people maintain their joint health by making their muscles stronger and increasing blood flow to the joint, which makes it easier to move about.

[Dr. Gaynes] What are the most effective ways to slow the progression of arthritis so that a person does not become disabled?

[Dr. Hootman] Being overweight or obese not only increases someone's risk for getting arthritis, but it also complicates the disease once they have it. So, losing weight if they need to lose weight or maintaining normal body weight is important for disease management. The other thing is to get early treatment and appropriate management from their healthcare provider, which may involve medications or other treatments, such as physical therapy. As I mentioned before, education about the disease — learning how to cope with the disease — is important, as well as getting appropriate physical activity.

[Dr. Gaynes] How long and how often should a person exercise for best results?

[Dr. Hootman] People with arthritis should choose activities that are low impact, meaning they don't jar the joints that much. Such examples are walking, bicycling, water exercise, and swimming. What we recommend for people with arthritis is they should strive to get, at minimum, 30 minutes a day of aerobic exercise, which is something that increases the heart rate or breathing rate. They should do that at least three days per week. They should also participate in strengthening exercises to strengthen the muscles around their joints at least two days per week.

[Dr. Gaynes] Are there any other chronic conditions that present particular problems for patients with arthritis?

[Dr. Hootman] Yes. We know that people with arthritis often have other chronic conditions, such as cardiovascular disease or diabetes. Diabetes is one disease, in particular, because it also has effects on the feet, with foot ulcers, and nerve problems that can involve pain, and people just don't get around very well. So, coupled with arthritis, diabetes can be a real barrier to getting appropriate physical activity.

[Dr. Gaynes] Where can listeners get more information about arthritis?

[Dr. Hootman] There are two websites. The CDC's website is www.cdc.gov/arthritis, and the Arthritis Foundation's website is www.arthritis.org.

[Dr. Gaynes] Jennifer, thanks for sharing this information with our listeners today.

[Dr. Hootman] Thank you.

[Dr. Gaynes] That's it for this week's show. Be sure and join us next week. Until then, be well. This is Dr. Robert Gaynes for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.