



## A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

### *Exercise Away the Pain*

National Arthritis Month — May 2010

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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.

Nowadays, it seems like there's a pill for everything, but for the 46 million U.S. adults affected by arthritis, the best medicine might be a couple of laps around the block.

Dr. Charles Helmick is a researcher with CDC's National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. He's joining us today to discuss arthritis. Welcome to the show, Chad.

[Dr. Helmick] Thank you very much.

[Dr. Gaynes] Chad, what causes arthritis?

[Dr. Helmick] Well, the most common type of arthritis is osteoarthritis and osteoarthritis represents a breakdown of the joint tissues and nobody really knows what causes that. It's associated with being overweight, having joint injuries in the past, and getting older. But there are other types of arthritis, as well, for example, rheumatoid arthritis. That's an autoimmune disease where your body's immune system attacks the joints for some reason that we don't yet know.

[Dr. Gaynes] Is arthritis a condition that only affects the elderly?

[Dr. Helmick] Well, there are 46 million people with arthritis and most of those people are under age 65, in the working age population. But you're right, in a way, because in the older population, the risk is much higher of getting arthritis.

[Dr. Gaynes] So is the prevalence of arthritis expected to increase as our population ages?

[Dr. Helmick] Yeah, it certainly is. The population is getting older; as I said, we estimate that 46 million people have arthritis now and we project that by 2030, 67 million people will have arthritis.

[Dr. Gaynes] Chad, tell us, is there a cure for arthritis?

[Dr. Helmick] There's no cure for arthritis right now. Most of what we do is treat arthritis pain and limitations, and for some types of arthritis, for example, rheumatoid arthritis, there are some very good medications now that can help prevent some of the more severe adverse effects.

[Dr. Gaynes] What's the most common treatment for arthritis?

[Dr. Helmick] Well, the most common treatment for arthritis is usually medication of various sorts to treat pain, but what we found is that physical activity can help quite a bit.

[Dr. Gaynes] What kinds of activities or exercises can actually help alleviate the pain from arthritis?

[Dr. Helmick] You know, people are surprised to hear that being physically active can help reduce the pain of arthritis, but it's true and there's very good evidence that it's true. There are simple things like walking, bicycling, and swimming that can help. For people that need more help, there are programs that you can go to that show you how to exercise safely.

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

[Dr. Helmick] Well, you can get more information from the CDC website [www.cdc.gov/arthritis](http://www.cdc.gov/arthritis), and there you'll find plenty of information about arthritis, but you'll also find a link to the Arthritis Foundation where there's more information about arthritis education.

[Dr. Gaynes] Thanks, Chad. I've been talking today with CDC's Dr. Charles Helmick about arthritis.

Remember, people with arthritis can improve their strength and flexibility through a variety of activities including stretching, swimming, walking, and biking. Ask your healthcare provider to recommend an exercise regimen that's appropriate for your age and physical condition.

Until next time, 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](http://www.cdc.gov) or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.