

Your Guide to Managing Arthritic Joint Pain

We use our joints in most every movement we make. When you suffer from osteoarthritis, daily movement can hurt. Here are some practical tips for coping better with painful joints.

WHAT IS OSTEO- ARTHRITIS?

Joints are the points where bones meet in our bodies. While there are many reasons for joint pain, including certain diseases and injuries, the most common cause is osteoarthritis.

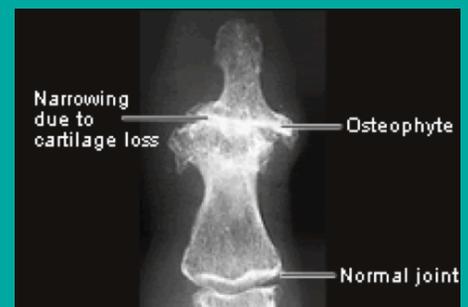


Figure 8. An x-ray showing the finger of a person with nodal osteoarthritis

This X-ray shows the finger of a person with osteoarthritis. You can see the difference between the healthy, normal joint below and the unhealthy joint at the top. In the arthritic joint there's a narrowing in the gap between the bones due to cartilage loss.

WHO GETS OSTEO-ARTHRITIS?

The condition can strike at any age, but usually affects people 55 and up. Women are more likely to suffer from osteoarthritis. Other known risk factors include:

Injuries: An injury to a joint in an accident or during physical activity can lead to the development of osteoarthritis.

Obesity: Being overweight places more pressure on certain joints.

Certain diseases: Diabetes, gout and rheumatoid arthritis may contribute to osteoarthritic changes.

Bone defects: Malformed joints or cartilage can lead to osteoarthritis.

Genetics: You may be born with a higher propensity for the condition.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF OSTEOARTHRITIS?

Common symptoms of osteoarthritis include:

Pain: You have joint pain during or following activity, or ongoing pain that may keep you awake at night.

Tenderness: The area near the joint feels tender when pressed.

Stiffness: The joint feels stiff first thing in the morning or after periods of rest.

A grating feeling: Your bones rub together when you use the joint and you may feel that as a grating sensation.

Less flexibility: You're not able to achieve a full range of joint motion.

Bone spurs: You have extra pieces of bones that have formed on and around a joint, which can feel like hard bumps through your skin.



Does your day begin with sore, achy hands?



Do your knees throb after you spend a long day gardening?

TOP 10 WAYS TO PROTECT YOUR JOINTS

1 Respect pain

Stop activities before you reach the point of discomfort or pain.

Limit activities that cause pain lasting more than one hour after you stop.

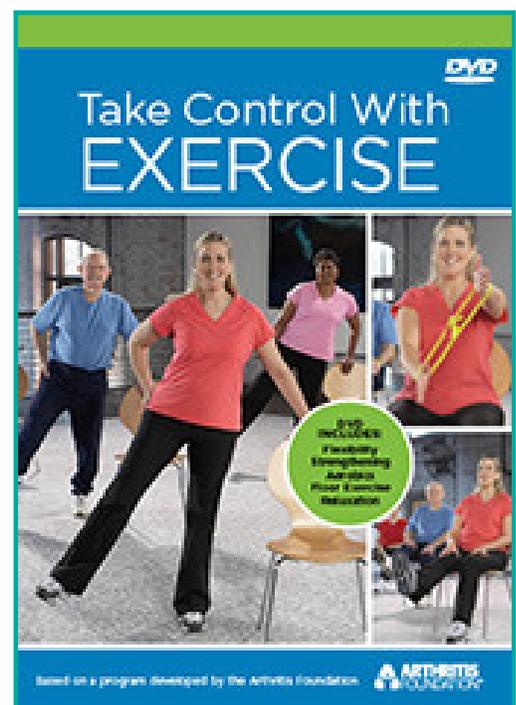
Don't let fear of pain make you inactive, as that can result in loss of motion and strength.

2 Eat well and exercise

Follow a balanced, nutritious diet to maintain strength and manage your weight.

Perform daily activities and exercises that help you achieve a full range of motion for each joint.

Vary your exercises so you don't put excessive pressure on certain joints.



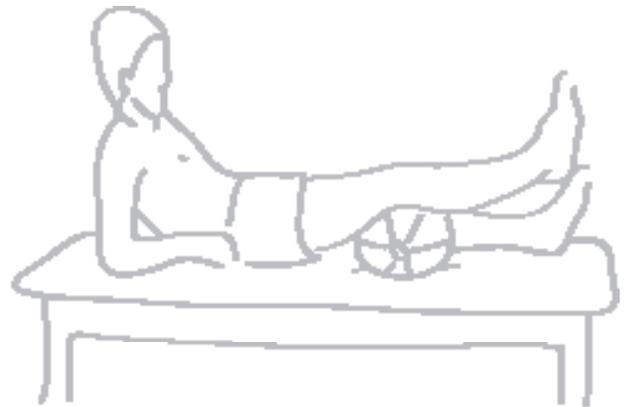
Try the [Arthritis Foundation](#) exercise DVD

Exercises to Reduce Joint Pain

Following are several exercises to strengthen your hips and knees. In each case, hold the pose for several seconds and repeat several times. Do the exercises several times per day.

Terminal knee extension:

Recline on your forearms with a prop under your knee. Straighten your knee by tightening the muscle on top of your thigh.



Straight leg raise:

Recline on your forearms, tighten the muscle on the front of your thigh, and lift your leg 8-10 inches from the floor or table, keeping your knee locked.



Standing knee flexion:

While standing, bend your heel up as far as possible.



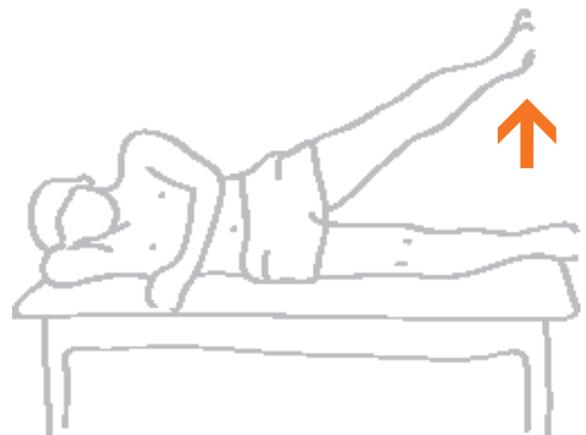
Quadriceps sets:

Sit with your legs extended, then tighten the muscles on top of your thigh by pushing your knees down into the floor or table.



Side-lying hip abduction:

While lying on your side, tighten the muscle on the front of your thigh, then lift your leg 8-10 inches away from the floor or table.



3 Balance activity and rest

Rest before growing tired.

Plan rest periods during difficult or long activities.

Stand up after sitting for 20-30 minutes.

Reposition yourself often.

Limit activities that cause pain lasting more than one hour after you stop.

Plan difficult activities for peak energy times.

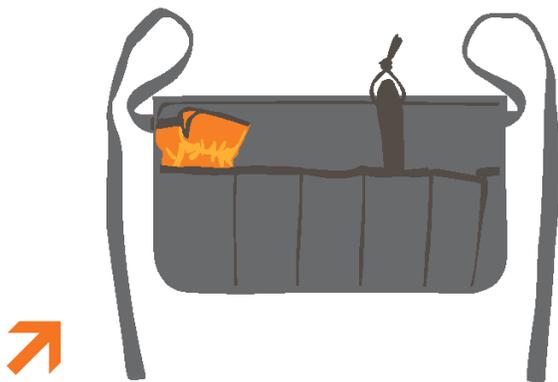
4 Avoid overusing painful joints

When performing activities, try to distribute the weight over stronger or healthier joints.

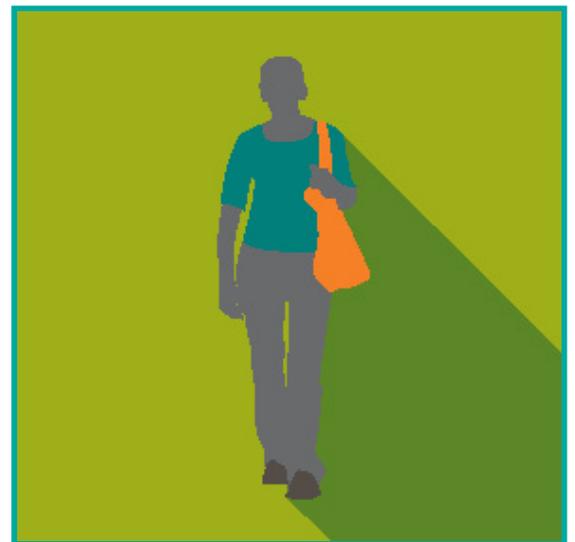
Always use proper lifting techniques.

Instead of carrying heavy items, push them in a shopping cart.

Instead of bending and twisting, use your hip to push open doors and your feet to close lower drawers.



Instead of carrying tools in a traditional toolbox, wear a small tool belt that rests on your hips



Use your larger elbow and shoulder joints to carry the weight of a purse instead of holding it by the handle

Watch your posture

Stand straight with your head high, shoulders back, stomach in, and hips and knees straight.

Hold your body erect while walking. Let your arms swing freely at your sides and your weight shift easily from one side to the other.

If you have osteoarthritis in your legs or knees, consider using a cane.

Avoid repetitive or painful hand activities

Don't grip tighter than necessary.

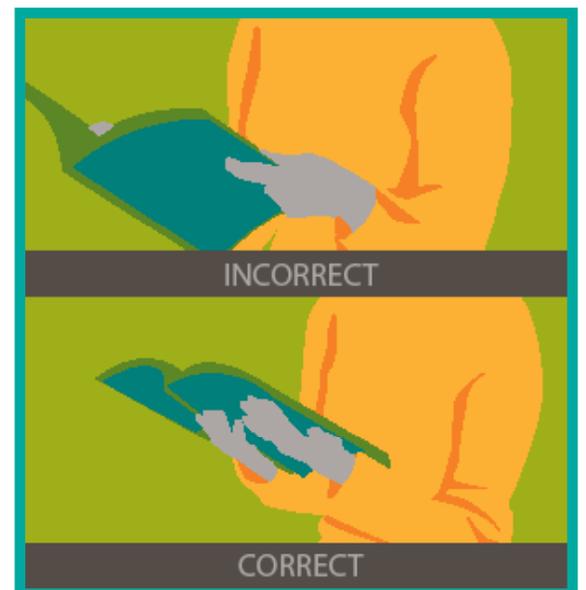
Avoid holding anything for prolonged periods. Take breaks from holding a newspaper or book, or from using garden tools or kitchen utensils.

Use utensils and tools with adaptive handles that take pressure off your hand and wrist joints. You can find adaptive equipment at:

- www.pattersonmedical.com
- www.thewright-stuff.com or
- www.ncmedical.com



Use adaptive utensils, such as these jar and bottle openers



Try not to grip or hold anything tighter than necessary



7 Protect your thumb joints

Avoid strong, constant pressure to the tip of the thumb.

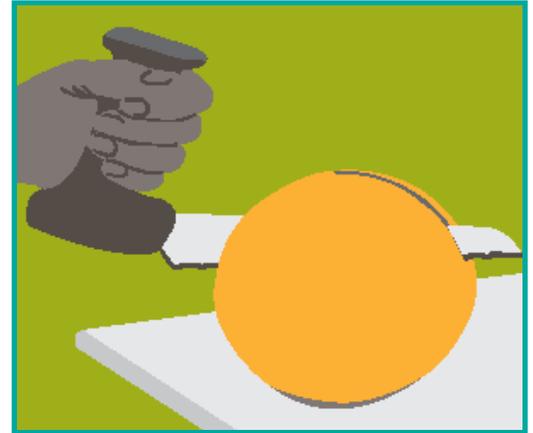
Open containers with the palms and heels of your hands, instead of relying heavily on your thumbs.

Use an electric can opener.

Hold objects as lightly as possible.

Use utensils with larger, built-up handles.

Type instead of writing with a pen or pencil, or use writing utensils with adaptive handles.



Use utensils with large, built-up handles that are easier on the thumb joints



This device can help you spare your thumbs while opening medication bottles

8 Try over-the-counter pain medications

For mild to moderate pain, try acetaminophen (Tylenol) to relieve pain.

Use non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as Advil, Motrin IB, and Aleve to relieve pain and inflammation. Talk to your doctor before using NSAIDs if you're over age 65 or have stomach problems, as they may contribute to other health issues.

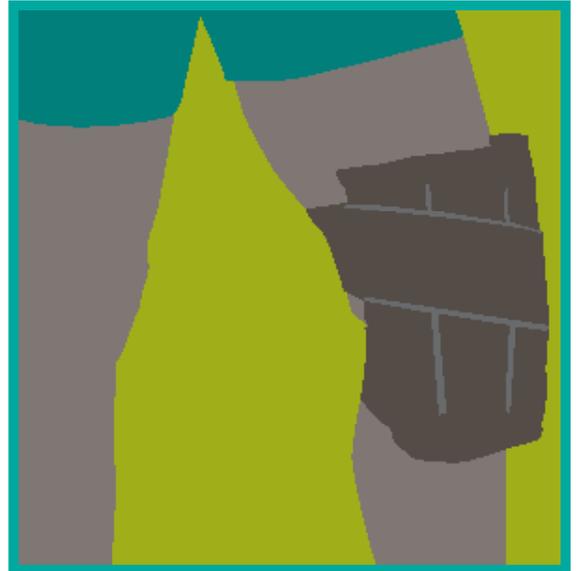
Try over-the-counter pain creams and gels for temporary relief.

9

Go hot and cold

Use a heating pad to relieve stiffness and help manage pain.

Try a cool compress or ice pack to help relieve pain and minimize muscle spasms during a flare up or sudden onset of pain.



These heating pads move with you and are microwavable





See your doctor

If you have joint pain for more than a few weeks, see your doctor. Depending on the severity of your symptoms, your doctor may recommend one or more of the following treatments:

Joint Pain Treatments

A stronger NSAID

Physical or occupational therapy or devices, such as braces or shoe inserts

Cortisone shots or hyaluronic acid injections

For the most extreme cases, joint-replacement and bone-realignment surgical options

IN SUMMARY

Don't let joint pain become a way of life. Take action today to manage your symptoms and slow further joint damage. With the right mix of lifestyle changes and pain relief treatments, you can lead a healthy, active life.