

What **you** Should Know



Arthritis & Heart Disease

WHAT IS ARTHRITIS?

Arthritis literally means joint inflammation. But the term is often used to refer to any of the more than 100 diseases that affect the joints – where two or more bones meet to allow movement. Currently, there are 46 million people diagnosed with arthritis in the United States. Two of the most common types of arthritis are:

Osteoarthritis (OA): a condition affecting 27 million Americans in which the joint cartilage – the tough, smooth, shock-absorbing tissue that covers the ends of the bones where they meet – breaks down, causing pain and stiffness.

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA): a condition affecting 1.3 million Americans in which the body's immune system attacks the thin membrane (synovium) that lines the joints, causing pain, swelling, inflammation, redness, heat and, if not stopped, joint destruction.

WHAT IS HEART DISEASE?

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States and is a major cause of disability. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that in 2009, 785,000 Americans will have a new coronary attack, and about 470,000 will have a recurrent attack. Heart disease is a term that encompasses a number of specific heart conditions, the most common of which is coronary heart disease, which can lead to heart attack.

ARE ARTHRITIS AND HEART DISEASE RELATED?

Arthritis and heart disease often occur simultaneously. In fact, a recent study found that arthritis affects 57 percent of adults with heart disease. For people with rheumatoid arthritis, their RA is now known to be a separate risk factor for heart disease like cholesterol. All people with arthritis should check with their doctor to understand their risk for heart disease.

SELF MANAGEMENT FOR ARTHRITIS & HEART DISEASE

Maintaining a healthy lifestyle is important for people with arthritis and heart disease. In particular, physical activity is recommended for people with both diseases. However, recent research has shown that 25 percent of people with both heart disease and arthritis are not physically active.

Unfortunately for those people, physical activity is one of several healthy self-management tools that can help both arthritis and heart disease. The following sections outline how diet, exercise and maintaining a healthy weight can improve your health with both diseases and even prevent some forms of each.

WEIGHT LOSS

Being overweight and obese are major risk factors for hip and knee OA and heart disease. If you are overweight, losing weight can reduce that risk. If you already have OA or heart disease, losing weight can improve them.



Modest weight loss will alleviate pressure from the lower extremities, helping to ease pain in the hips, knees and feet. Losing just 15 pounds can cut knee pain in half.

EXERCISE

Exercise is important for everyone. Research shows that 30 minutes of aerobic exercise five days a week can lower blood pressure, cholesterol levels and risk of cardiovascular disease. People with arthritis often think physical activity will worsen their pain and arthritis. However, exercise actually improves pain and joint mobility in people with arthritis. Regular exercise is also important for improving your general health and sense of well-being, which can suffer if you have a chronic disease. Check with your doctor about the right program for you.

DIET

While diet does not have an immediate effect on arthritis symptoms, a healthy, balanced diet is important to improve general health, minimize the risk of cardiovascular disease and control weight, which plays an important role in both diseases. Furthermore, research is showing the certain nutrients, such as omega-3 fatty acids found in certain fish and other foods, can reduce inflammation.

A healthy diet should consist of whole grains, vegetables and fruits, poultry, fish, beans, peas and nuts and contain 300 milligrams or less of daily cholesterol.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For additional information about heart disease, contact:

American Heart Association

National Center

7272 Greenville Avenue

Dallas, TX 75231

1-800-AHA-USA-1 or 1-800-242-8721

www.americanheart.org

Take Action

These changes can reduce your risk of heart disease and give you a greater sense of well-being.

- ❖ **Quit smoking.** Give up cigarettes, cigars and pipes permanently.
- ❖ **Decrease sodium intake.** Experts say Americans consume two to three times the amount of sodium the body needs.
- ❖ **Use fats sparingly.** Limit the use of saturated fats like butter, and choose polyunsaturated vegetable-based oils like olive oil when cooking. Avoid fried foods and processed foods containing trans fats.
- ❖ **Be active often.** Stick to a structured exercise program and choose more active options as you go through daily tasks.
- ❖ **Get Involved.** Contact your local Arthritis Foundation office to learn more about our programs and services.

Arthritis Foundation Programs Can Help

The Arthritis Foundation's Life Improvement Series includes evidence-based land and water exercise programs as well as a self-help program that can help you improve your pain, independence and health through increasing your physical activity. Programs include:

- The Arthritis Foundation Exercise Program
- The Arthritis Foundation Aquatic Program
- The Arthritis Foundation Tai Chi Program
- The Arthritis Foundation Self-Help Program

Contact your local Arthritis Foundation office or visit www.arthritis.org/programs to find a program near you.



The mission of the Arthritis Foundation is to improve lives through leadership in the prevention, control and cure of arthritis and related diseases.

The Arthritis Foundation has invested nearly \$400 million in arthritis research since 1948. The Arthritis Foundation also supports public policy efforts on behalf of the 46 million Americans diagnosed with arthritis.

To learn about programs and services, contact us at **800-283-7800** or visit us on the Web at www.arthritis.org.