

A Look at Arthritis

The word arthritis literally means joint inflammation, but it is often used to refer to a group of more than 100 rheumatic diseases that cause pain, stiffness, and swelling in the joints. The most common are osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, fibromyalgia, and **gout**. Most forms of arthritis are associated with pain that may be divided into two categories: acute and persistent. Acute pain is temporary. It can last a couple of seconds or a few minutes but diminishes as recovery occurs. Acute pain is associated with burns, cuts and fractures. Chronic pain, for example that felt by people with arthritis, ranges from mild to severe and can last days, months, years or even a lifetime.



Osteoarthritis is One of the Most Frequent Causes of Physical Disability Among Adults

A lot more than 20 million people in the United States, alone, have the disease. By 2030, according to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), 20 percent of all Americans--about 70 million people--will have passed their 65th birthday and you will be at a higher risk of osteoarthritis.

Arthritis limits the everyday activity of 8 million U.S. citizens, and this disability creates huge problems for the persons, their families, as well as the nation as a whole. Each year, arthritis results in 9,500 deaths and also 750,000 hospitalizations. According to the National Center for Chronic Disease Control, in 1997, medical care for arthritis (in the U.S.) was \$51 thousand.

This Disease Affects Each Person Really Differently

In some people it advances quickly and in others the symptoms tend to be much more serious and painful. Medical practitioners do not yet know what causes arthritis, but they suspect a combination of factors including: being overweight, the aging process, family history, joint injury, and stresses on the joints from work or sporting activities.

There is Not One Treatment that Applies to Everybody Who is Affected With Arthritis

With your personal input, a medical specialist will develop a management and also treatment plan designed to minimize your specific pain and also improve the function of your joints. A number of treatments can provide short-term alleviation. They include: medications such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen, the use of hot and cold packs, using a splint or a brace to protect joint pain, or perhaps using muscle-relaxing massages.

The long-term, pain relief may be observed with: new drugs, called biological reaction modifiers, which reduce inflammation in the joints; corticosteroids such as Prednisone; weight reduction; dietary changes; exercise (swimming, walking and low-impact aerobic exercise); as well as surgery to replace a joint that has badly deteriorated. In some instances, nutritional supplements may be of use.

The long-term goal of pain management is to help you deal with this chronic, often disabling disease. You may be caught in a cycle of pain, depression, and tension. To break this cycle, you need to be an active participant in managing your pain. The role you play in planning your treatment is very important. You and your health care providers must work together closely to develop a personalized and effective treatment program. Research has shown that patients who are well informed and participate actively in their own individual care, experience less pain, make much less visits to the doctor and lead a much more enjoyable life.

About the actual author: Larry Denton is a retired history teacher having taught 33 years at Hobson High in Hobson, Montana. He is currently Vice President of Elfin Enterprises, Inc. a company dedicated to providing information and resources on a variety of topics. For an therapy room full of information and valuable resources to assist you in dealing with arthritis, visit [http://www. ArthritisAide.com](http://www.ArthritisAide.com).

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