

How to cope with arthritis pain

Question: My 71-year-old mother has been diagnosed with osteoarthritis. She has been suffering from pain in her knees and wrists during the past year. I would like to learn more about arthritis and what my mother may be able to do to cope with the pain. What information do you have?

Answer: The National Institute on Aging published the brochure "Arthritis Advice." The brochure states arthritis is one of the most common diseases in this country. Millions of adults and half of all people age 65 and older are troubled by arthritis. Older people most often have osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis or gout. Osteoarthritis is the most common type of arthritis in older people. Osteoarthritis starts when cartilage, the tissue that pads bone in a joint, begins to become ragged and wears away. Rheumatoid arthritis is an autoimmune disease. In rheumatoid arthritis, your body attacks the lining of a joint just as it would if it were trying to protect you from injury or disease. Rheumatoid arthritis leads to inflammation in your joints. This inflammation causes pain, swelling and stiffness that may last for hours. Gout is one of the most painful forms of arthritis. An attack can begin when crystals of uric acid form in the connective tissue and joint spaces. These deposits lead to swelling, redness, heat, pain and stiffness in the joint.

Warning signs of arthritis are lasting joint pain, joint swelling, joint stiffness, tenderness or pain when touching a joint, problems using or moving a joint normally, or warmth and redness in a joint. If any one of these symptoms lasts longer than two weeks, it is important to see your doctor or a rheumatologist. Common treatment choices include rest, exercise, eating a healthy, well-balanced diet and learning the right way to use and protect joints. Wearing supportive shoes and using a cane when walking can also help with pain in the feet, knees and hips. It is also important to take medicines suggested by your doctor and properly rest your joints. Exercise is a good way to stay fit, keep muscles strong and control arthritis symptoms. Daily exercise such as walking or swimming helps keep the joints moving, lessens pain and makes the muscles around the joints stronger.

Call Catholic Charities' Answers for the Aging at 410-646-0100 or 1-888-502-7587 (toll-free in Maryland) if you would like a free copy of this brochure or other referral

information related to seniors' needs.

Winter safety tips for elderly

Question: Last year, my neighbor experienced difficulties with his health as a result of hypothermia. My 75-year-old grandfather lives on a farm. He still insists on doing a lot of the outdoor chores even in the bitter cold weather. I worry about him. Do you have any information regarding safety tips for older adults who spend time outside during the winter?

Answer: The National Institute on Aging published the booklet "Stay Safe in Cold Weather!" This publication explains older adults can lose body heat more quickly than when they were younger. Being outside in the cold or in a cold house can lead to hypothermia. Hypothermia is what happens when your body temperature gets very low. For older adults, a body temperature colder than 95 degrees can cause various health problems such as heart attack, kidney problems, liver damage or worse.

This booklet provides suggestions from older adults regarding tips for staying warm during the winter in order to lower your chance of getting hypothermia. There is also a detailed list of the signs of hypothermia, which include cold feet and hands, pale skin, slower than normal speech and becoming angry or confused.

The booklet provides tips for treating older adults with possible hypothermia until medical help arrives. There is also a section that describes what medical conditions or medicines can put individuals at a higher risk for hypothermia. There is also a list of resource organizations individuals can turn to for more information.

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