

## **LIVING WELL WITH ARTHRITIS**

People have been suffering from the pain and stiffness of arthritis for centuries. The earliest signs of the disease were discovered in the skeletons of Native Americans as early as 4500 BC and in Egyptian mummies dating back 2590 BC.

Today almost 27 million adults of all ages have been diagnosed with arthritis. The first signs of arthritis usually begin around age forty and progress slowly. Women over 50 are more likely to suffer from arthritis symptoms than men. Even dogs, cats and other animals can also suffer from the pain of arthritis.

Although there is no cure for this disease there are a variety of techniques and remedies families of older adults can use to manage their parent's pain and help them maintain an active lifestyle.

### **ARTHRITIS SYMPTOMS**

There are many different kinds of arthritis. Osteoarthritis is the most common form. It develops over time as cartilage (the tissue cushion at the ends of bones) wears away causing pain, swelling, and loss of joint mobility. Arthritis symptoms include:

- Chronic joint pain
- Difficulty using or moving a joint
- Creaky or cracking joints especially in the knees and fingers.
- Stiff, tender or swollen joints

### **ARTHRITIS RISK FACTORS**

Half of people over 65 suffer with this painful ailment so chances are your older parent – and yourself – will suffer from stiff, aching hands, knees, hips, lower back, and neck at some point in your lives. Most commonly affected joints are shoulders, neck, elbow, wrist, ankle and feet.

Risk factors for osteoarthritis include:

- Family history
- Overweight
- Previous joint injury or overuse of a joint
- Lack of physical activity
- Growing older

### **MANAGING ARTHRITIS PAIN**

Although arthritis can't be cured there are a variety of home remedies and lifestyle changes that will help your older family member feel better. Pain relievers – either over-the-counter arthritis medications or prescription drugs are very helpful in managing arthritis pain. However many of these preparations can cause stomach or intestinal upsets and other side effects. Ask your family doctor to recommend a safe and effective pain reliever.

Other at-home arthritis pain management techniques include:

- Weight loss. Losing just 15 pounds can reduce knee pain in overweight older people.
- Sturdy, supportive shoes and a cane relieve pain in hips, knees and ankles.
- Regular, moderate physical activities – like walking -- keep joints flexible and improve muscle strength.
- Heat or ice packs relieve pain and reduce swelling.
- Soaking in a warm bath.

A variety of folk remedies for arthritis – like gin-soaked raisins, alfalfa tea, blackstrap molasses mixed with cranberry juice, rubbing affected joints with hot vinegar at bedtime, copper bracelets – claim to relieve arthritic pain. These remedies have not been tested or proven to be helpful and some may be harmful. Encourage your parent to stick with standard treatments for managing arthritic symptoms and medications prescribed by a doctor.

## **CAREGIVERS AND ARTHRITIS**

Many older adults believe that arthritis pain is just another discomfort of the aging process that they have to live with. As a caregiver concerned with your parent's health and well-being you can work with him identify his arthritic symptoms and develop strategies and treatment plans to manage his pain and help him make the most of his life.

*I don't deserve this award, but I have arthritis and I don't deserve that either."*

*– Jack Benny*

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