

Jeni's Health & Fitness Tips

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Hi Everyone!

Approximately one in three adults suffer from some form of arthritis, and the disease affects about twice as many women as men. The word arthritis is from the Greek *arthro* (joint) and *itis* (inflammation). It covers a wide range of conditions that affect the health of the bone joints in the body. Among the many forms of arthritis are rheumatoid arthritis, osteoarthritis, gout, still's disease and ankylosing spondylitis.

The disease is by no means a recent development; osteoarthritis has been discovered in dinosaurs and traces of human arthritis date back as far as 4500 BC. It has been discovered in Egyptian mummies and in skeletal remains of Native Americans.

While some forms of arthritis such as rheumatoid are autoimmune diseases, the more common osteoarthritis is a degenerative joint disease caused from strains and injuries from repetitive motion, overexertion and falls. This largely affects older people and results from the degeneration of joint cartilage. To accurately diagnose the type of arthritis a patient is suffering from, he or she will need to undergo thorough tests by a doctor.

Arthritic joints can be sensitive to weather changes. This increased sensitivity is thought to be caused by the affected joints developing extra nerve endings in an attempt to protect the joint from further damage.

Many arthritic people avoid exercise as it causes them discomfort and they fear it may damage the joints. However research has shown that exercise is an essential tool in managing arthritis. Regular, moderate exercise offers a wide range of benefits by reducing joint pain and stiffness, building strong muscle to support the joints and to increase flexibility and endurance. Exercise also promotes overall health and fitness by increasing energy levels, controlling weight, improving sleep, decreasing depression and increasing wellbeing and self-esteem. Exercise also minimises the risk of health problems such as osteoporosis and heart disease. Prior to commencing an exercise program you should consult with your doctor as to the most beneficial type of exercise for you.

Starting an exercise program can seem like a daunting proposition. The important thing to remember is to start slow and make it fun. It is always good to start with gentle exercises, such as Tai Chi or stretching that will improve your range of motion and help you perform daily activities. Once you feel comfortable you can move on to weight training and endurance exercises such as walking, swimming or cycling. If you find exercise painful, you may want to start with a water exercise program. In the water your body's buoyancy reduces stress on your hips, knees, and spine. Remember to discuss any discomforts you are experiencing with your instructor so that a more comfortable alternative can be found for you.

Yours in health,

Jeni