

Living with Aches and Pains— September is Arthritis Awareness Month

*Kim Slauenwhite, Community Education Coordinator, Nova Scotia Division
The Arthritis Society – Nova Scotia Division*

We all know someone living with the pain of arthritis. It is one of the most prevalent chronic diseases in Canada. Living with arthritis is not as simple as dealing with ‘aches and pains’ – arthritis is a serious condition that can alter careers and transform family lives and affects more people than you may realize.

More than 4.6 million Canadians are living with arthritis and over 60 per cent of them are under the age of 65. In Nova Scotia, we have the highest prevalence of people with arthritis in Canada, approximately 1 in 4 people. Arthritis is not biased, striking anyone at anytime. Two-thirds of people living with arthritis are women and three in 1,000 people diagnosed will be under the age of 18.

We often think of arthritis as being one of two types: osteoarthritis, the ‘wear and tear’ version or rheumatoid, the ‘inflammatory’ arthritis. These are actually categories of which the over 100 types of arthritis fall under.

Degenerative arthritis is joint disease and is more common as we age. Osteoarthritis and degenerative disc disease will often occur in joints that have been subject to ‘wear and tear’ and/or repetitive movements through excessive use. The actual cartilage of the joint deteriorates causing stiffness, pain and sometimes swelling. Joint damage caused by osteoarthritis accounts for more than 80 per cent of hip replacement surgery and over 90 per cent of knee replacements in Canada.

Degenerative arthritis typically progresses over time which is why self-management techniques such as regular physical activity and exercise, healthy diet, and maintaining a healthy weight all greatly contribute to joint health.

Inflammatory arthritis can occur at any age, but typically strikes between the ages of 30 and 60 years. Inflammatory arthritis can develop slowly, affecting one joint then spreading to involve other joints, occurring over a period of weeks to months. It can also start suddenly, with an acute attack

on a joint which then begins to jump to other joints. Aching, pain, stiffness, warmth and swelling in the affected joints are the common symptoms. Low grade fever, weight loss, fatigue and/or anemia can also develop.

Inflammatory arthritis is an umbrella for a multitude of diseases. Rheumatoid arthritis is the most common, but this category also includes psoriatic arthritis, ankylosing spondylitis and lupus. Most inflammatory arthritis is categorized as an autoimmune disease. The body’s immune system becomes confused and begins to ‘attack’ the body, specifically the tissue in the lining of the joints. This causes swelling, pain, inflammation and joint destruction – early diagnoses and proper medical treatment is essential to minimize the long-term damage to the joint.

Visit www.arthritis.ca/understand-arthritis/symptom-checker to help determine if your symptoms could be arthritis.

Protecting Your Joints

Many people believe that developing arthritis is inevitable, a part of ‘growing old’. However, studies have shown that through active living, healthy eating, maintaining a healthy weight and managing stress, you can reduce the risk and manage the effects of arthritis. Finding a balance between staying active and keeping fit without stressing the joint is ideal.

Physical Activity and Exercise

Properly designed activities may not only decrease arthritis pain, but can also increase your flexibility, overall fitness and wellbeing. Keeping your joint active is also necessary to ‘feed’ the joint. Cartilage depends on joint movement to absorb nutrients and remove waste. As cartilage, ligaments and bone become stronger and more resilient with exercise, this helps keep the joint healthy!

Benefits of regular activity and exercise include:

- Decreased pain
- Increased muscle strength and endurance (stronger muscles help the joint not to work as hard, minimizing strain on the joint.)
- Increased bone strength & quality
- Healthy joints
- Increased joint range of motion
- Enhanced ability to perform daily activities
- Better sleep
- Improved balance
- Reduced risk of falls
- Enhanced self-confidence
- Healthy body weight (10 pounds of extra weight is equivalent to 40 pounds of pressure on your knees!)
- Improved ability to manage stress

A simple way to keep active during your day either at home or work is to incorporate our Top 10 Exercises into your daily routine. www.arthritis.ca/manage-arthritis/educational-resources-tools/printed-publications/top-10-exercises



The Arthritis Society is a charity that advocates on behalf of people living with arthritis. Since 1948, The Arthritis Society has been the largest non-government funder of basic and applied arthritis research in Canada, searching for underlying causes and subsequent cures for arthritis. With so many people in Canada living with

arthritis, it is our priority to offer a wide range of programming to provide education, information and services for those living with arthritis and their families. We advocate on behalf of Canadians living with arthritis, ensuring they have timely access to appropriate services and treatment options, while promoting a greater understanding of the disease.

If you would like to learn more about our programming and events in your area, visit our website at www.arthritis.ca.

**For previous *The Well Teacher* articles,
go to www.nstu.ca**

**Click on ► Communications ► NSTU Publications
► The Teacher ► The Well Teacher**