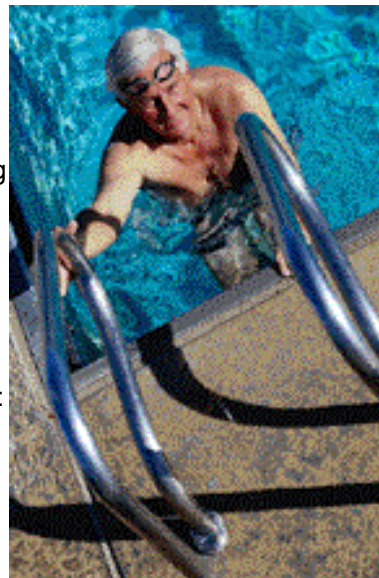


## ARTHRITIS: Managing Your Pain

Dealing with pain can be the hardest part of having arthritis or a related condition, but you can learn to manage it and its impact on your life.

**Causes of Pain:** Arthritis pain is caused by several factors, such as:

- **Inflammation**, the process that causes the redness and swelling in your joints;
- **Damage to joint tissues**, which results from the disease process or from stress, injury or pressure on the joints;
- **Fatigue that results from the disease process**, which can make your pain seem worse and harder to handle;
- **Depression or stress**, which results from limited movement or no longer doing activities you enjoy.



**Take Control:** Arthritis may limit some of the things you can do, but it doesn't have to control your life. One way to reduce your pain is to build your life around wellness, not pain or sickness. Your mind plays an important role in how you feel pain and respond to illness. Thinking of pain as a signal to take positive action rather than an ordeal you have to endure can help you learn to manage your pain. You can do this by:

- Thinking **positive thoughts**,
- Having a **sense of humor**,
- Eating a **balanced diet**,
- **Exercising** regularly,
- **Enjoying activities** with friends and family.

It also means following your treatment plan, taking your medication properly and practicing relaxation.

**Exercise Regularly:** Through exercise, you can improve your overall health and fitness, as well as your arthritis symptoms. Regular appropriate exercise can help you manage pain, as well as keep joints moving, strengthen muscles around joints, increase energy, improve sleep, control weight and strengthen your heart. A physical therapist, occupational therapist, exercise physiologist or doctor can recommend an exercise program for you.

**Protect Your Joints:** Take care to do everyday tasks in ways that reduce stress on painful joints. Pay attention to your body for signals that it needs to rest. Pace yourself by balancing activity with rest. Avoid activities that hurt your joints. Use your largest and strongest joints and muscles whenever possible.

**Use Heat and Cold:** Using heat and cold treatments can reduce the pain and stiffness of arthritis. Cold packs numb the sore area and reduce inflammation and swelling. They are especially good for joint pain caused by a flare. Heat relaxes your muscles and stimulates blood circulation.

**Get Enough Sleep:** Sleep restores your energy so that you can better manage pain. It also rests your joints to reduce pain and swelling. Most people need seven to nine hours of sleep per night. If you feel tired and achy after lunch every day, taking a brief nap (15 to 20 minutes) can help restore your energy and spirits. If you have trouble sleeping at night, try relaxing quietly in the afternoon rather than taking a nap.

**Consider Massage:** Massage brings warmth and relaxation to the painful area. You can massage your own muscles or ask your doctor to recommend a professional who is trained to give massages.

**Practice Relaxation:** People who are in pain experience both physical and emotional stress. Pain and stress have similar effects on the body: muscles tighten, breathing becomes fast and shallow, and heart rate and blood pressure go up. Relaxation can help you reverse these effects and give you a sense of control and well being that makes it easier to manage pain. Relaxation involves learning ways to calm and control your body and mind. There is no best way to learn how to relax, as long as you relax both your body and mind. It is important to suggest a pain management idea of your own.

*Excerpted from the Arthritis Foundation brochure on Managing Your Pain available at [www.arthritis.org](http://www.arthritis.org)*