

*The Truth*  *About Health*

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PAINS OF ARTHRITIS CAN BE REDUCED WITHOUT DRUGS AND SURGERIES

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Current research shows that one in three Americans will develop arthritis during adulthood. Of the hundreds of forms of arthritis, osteoarthritis is the biggest threat. Currently, 20 million people suffer from this form of the disease.

Osteoarthritis attacks the cartilage in the joints. When cartilage breaks down, the joint loses shape and misaligns. Spurs form on the end of the bone and shred the cartilage into small pieces. The pieces float in the joint space.

Arthritis costs billions of dollars per year in medical treatments and lost productivity. It is the leading disabler of Americans. Women are most at risk for getting the disease and it is most prevalent among caucasians.

Arthritis can be triggered by an early injury, but it is also hereditary.

Sedentary lifestyles and being overweight increase the risk of arthritis, but over-doing it can also strain the joints and trigger the onset of the disease.

“By and large this disease is a mechanical disease,” said Rowland Chang, President of the Arthritis Foundation and physician at Northwestern University.

“Unless we deal with the mechanics, just dealing with the chemistry is not likely to be as successful.”

Chang doesn't believe arthritis is an inevitable consequence of aging. “It's preventable and treatable, and hopefully over the course of time, it will be more preventable and treatable as we gain even more knowledge.”

Other experts at the Arthritis Foundation believe that the key is simply listening to our bodies. “Every pound gained can put as much as four times the stress on knees; losing just a few pounds can significantly reduce the pressure on the joints,” they noted.

According to Sharon Feldman, director of the Arthritis Center at the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago, joint replacements shouldn't be the first option and they aren't the only option.

Feldman said many doctors start patients on therapy prior to operations to get them in shape, but a growing number of patients cancel because the therapy made them feel better, move better and to finally realize that drugs and surgeries aren't the only solution to their pain and suffering.

Some preventative measures include maintaining good posture, starting new physical activities, remaining active and engaging in aerobic exercises, yoga or tai chi, which increase flexibility.

SOURCE: Chicago Tribune, March 17, 2004.