



EMPOWERING CAREGIVERS

This newsletter is to help caregivers who are caring for loved ones who are participating in the Family Caregiver Support Program. This newsletter will be sent monthly, to cover a variety of health and caregiving topics. If you have any suggestions or comments please email us at caremanagement@ursulineseniors.org.

HEALTH TOPIC OF THE MONTH: ARTHRITIS

Helping Your Loved One Cope with Arthritis

A person who has chronic arthritis face many challenges. It is important for your loved one to accept their limitations, learn ways to cope, and to adjust to life with chronic pain. It is important for you and the person you are caring for gain knowledge about arthritis. In moments where your loved one is having a bad day or is feeling defeated it is best to remind your loved one to focus on what they can do, rather than what they cannot do. Together a plan can be devised along with strategies in order to continue living a life to their fullest potential. Chronic arthritis pain will present whether your loved one participates in activities or not. It is important for the person you are caring for learn to make good sense to utilize your time and energy to activities they find most enjoyable and important to them. Some days will be better than others for your loved one that is why it is important to conserve energy for activities that your loved one truly enjoys to keep their spirits up.



For YOU the Care Giver...

The emotional impact of caring for someone with arthritis can sometimes experience emotions like anger, resentment, and frustration. Often caregivers feel guilty for having these feelings at all. For the person who is receiving care remind yourself as a caregiver what it is like to be cared for everyday. The impact of being dependent on others for personal things like washing and dressing can gradually effect your level of self esteem. These feelings between you and your loved one can effect your relationship. It is important to remember to communicate with your loved one. Be honest about your feelings and get support to help through difficult times.

Cooking Tips for People with Arthritis!

1. Use lightweight cooking tools
2. Use pots and pans with 2 handles
3. Invest in a food processor
4. Specialty knives simplify cutting
5. Pull up a stool!
6. Crockpots offer convenience
7. Soup is simple!
8. Planned Leftovers
9. Make kitchen shelves accessible
10. Store foods conveniently

By making your loved one's kitchen more accessible will give them a sense of independence. There are several different types of storage options for food. There is no reason for your loved one to struggle opening and closing tupperware containers!

What is Rheumatoid Arthritis?

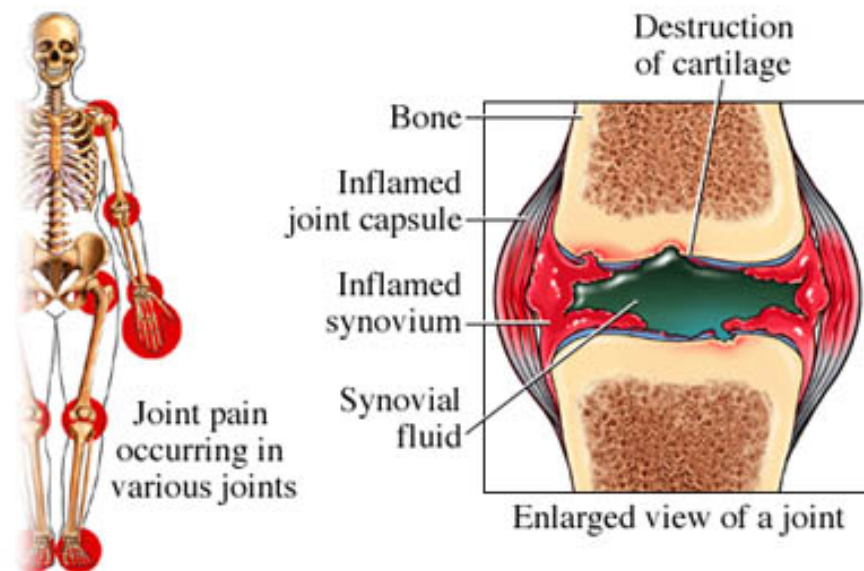
Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA) is an autoimmune disease that causes chronic inflammation of the joints. Rheumatoid Arthritis can also cause inflammation of the tissue around the joints, as well as in other organs in the body. Because it can affect multiple other organs of the body, rheumatoid arthritis is referred to as a systemic illness and is sometimes called rheumatoid disease. While rheumatoid arthritis is a chronic illness, meaning it can last for years, patients may experience long periods without symptoms. Typically, however, rheumatoid arthritis is a progressive illness that has the potential to cause joint destruction and functional disability.

What Causes Rheumatoid Arthritis?

The cause of Rheumatoid Arthritis is unknown. Even though infectious agents such as viruses, bacteria, and fungi have long been suspected, none has been proven as the cause. The cause of Rheumatoid Arthritis is a very active area of worldwide research. Some scientists believe that the tendency to develop rheumatoid arthritis may be genetically inherited. Since RA can damage tissue in the body, your loved one may also be at risk for damage to the eyes and lungs. Also, scientists have reported that smoking tobacco increases the risk of developing rheumatoid arthritis.

What are the Symptoms and Signs of Rheumatoid Arthritis?

The symptoms of Rheumatoid Arthritis come and go, depending on the level of tissue damage. When body tissues are inflamed, the disease is active. When tissue inflammation subsides, the disease is inactive (in remission). Your loved one's RA symptoms may disappear for weeks, months or even years. During this time, your loved one may generally feel well. When the disease becomes active again, symptoms will return. The return of disease activity and symptoms is called a flare. When the disease is active, symptoms can include fatigue, lack of appetite, low-grade fever, muscle and joint aches, and stiffness. Also during flares, joints frequently become red, swollen, painful, and tender. This occurs because the lining tissue of the joint becomes inflamed, resulting in the production of excessive joint.



How is Rheumatoid Arthritis Diagnosed?

The first step in the diagnosis of Rheumatoid Arthritis is a meeting between the doctor and the patient. As a caregiver, it is important to be an active member in the diagnoses, symptom, and treatment stages of RA. The doctor reviews the history of symptoms, examines the joints for inflammation and deformity, the skin for rheumatoid nodules, and other parts of the body for inflammation. Certain blood and X-ray tests are often obtained. The diagnosis will be based on the pattern of symptoms, the distribution of the inflamed joints, and the blood and x-ray findings. Several visits may be necessary before the doctor can be certain of the diagnosis. A doctor with special training in arthritis and related diseases is called a rheumatologist.

A blood test can also measure of how fast red blood cells fall to the bottom of a test tube. Joint x-rays may be normal or only show swelling of soft tissues early in the disease. As the disease progresses x-rays can show bony erosions typical of rheumatoid arthritis in the joints. Joint x-rays can also be helpful in monitoring the progression of disease and joint damage over time. Bone scanning, a radioactive test procedure, can demonstrate the inflamed joints.

The doctor may elect to perform an office procedure in which a sterile needle and syringe are used to drain joint fluid out of the joint for study in the laboratory. Analysis of the joint fluid, in the laboratory, can help to exclude other causes of arthritis, such as infection and gout. This procedure can also be helpful in relieving joint swelling and pain

People with Arthritis Can Exercise (PACE)

Cost: varies

Where? UPMC St. Margaret

When? Offered Several Times a year! Call for information!

To Register: 412-784-4144

PACE is a 12 session exercise program for people with arthritis. Under the guidance of trained personnel participants learn activities that will increase joint flexibility, range of motion, and muscle strength.

Bone and Joint Health Series

Cost: FREE

Where? Magee-Womens Hospital

When? Offered several times a year, call for more information

To Register: 412-802-8299

This information is provided at no cost to hear from orthopaedic surgeons, rheumatologists, exercise specialists and other care professionals about bone and joint health.

Other Types of Arthritis...

Osteoarthritis: This type of arthritis is usually associated with aging. This type of arthritis affects weight-bearing areas such as the spine, hips, knees, and feet.

Symptoms of Osteoarthritis:

- * Bone enlargements in fingertips are common
- * Pain: aching pain, stiffness, or difficulty moving the joint may develop in 1 or more joints. The pain may get worse with overuse.

Prevention of Osteoarthritis:

Unfortunately there is no absolute way to prevent osteoarthritis. Lifestyle changes may reduce or limit symptoms.

Gout: This common form of arthritis is due to deposition of monosodium urate crystals. Not only are the joints affected but the kidneys are a target of this disease. Both dietary changes and medicines are very effective in treating this disorder.

Symptoms of Gout:

- * Sudden onset of a hot, red, swollen joint
- * Kidney stones are more frequent in patients with gout
- * The first attack only usually attacks one or two joints, but over time multiple joints can be involved simultaneously

Prevention:

- * Eat a Low-cholesterol, low fat-diet
- * Slowly lose weight
- * Restrict your intake of alcohol
- * Stay hydrated



Let's Get Cooking!

Don't let arthritis limit you in the kitchen. There are a number of assistive devices and technologies that can help make cooking easier. These tips can be a benefit to almost everyone who needs to find products that place less stress on joints and extremities.

Here are a few tips:

- Look for utensils that have easy-to-grip, non-slip handles. The easy-grip handles are larger, but the added size makes them easier to hold.
- For essential tasks, such as cutting, consider a rocker-style cutter or rolling pizza cutter that also can relieve stress on joints.
- Choose durable, yet lightweight pans with chubby, easy-grip handles on both sides of the pan.
- For cooks who have a favorite pan such as a heavier cast-iron skillet that they just cannot part with, consider using mitt-like potholders for both hands.
- Choose baking pans with handles. For example, a cookie sheet with a grip-style handle on each end is easier to hold than rim- or handleless versions.
- Invest in a jar opener that can be mounted on the underside of an upper cabinet, making opening jars easier.
- Invest in a non-skid mat to place under cutting boards and mixing bowls to prevent them from slipping.
- Consider small appliances that can complete some cooking and baking steps. If kneading bread by hand is no longer feasible because of pain, consider a mixer with a dough hook or bread machine that will bake the bread, too.

