

Separating Arthritis Facts from Fiction

Learn the truth behind some big misconceptions about arthritis

Arthritis Only Happens to the Elderly

False. It's true that as one ages, the prevalence of both inflammatory arthritis (when joints become swollen and warm as a result of inflammation) and osteoarthritis (when the cartilage and bone wear away as a result of an injury or over time) goes up, but that doesn't mean arthritis strikes only the elderly. Inflammatory arthritis, which occurs because it runs in one's family, typically begins early in life. According to the Arthritis Foundation, for many people, rheumatoid arthritis begins between the ages of 30 and 50. Osteoarthritis can also start early and is most common in middle age, occurring most often after age 45.

Joint Pain is Inevitable with Age

False. Creaking knees, hips, and ankles aren't necessarily normal aches and pains that come with age. The pain might signify arthritis, which can be treated. Gaeta published a nationwide telephone survey with some stunning results: nearly one in five (19%) had chronic pain like that caused by arthritis. Yet nearly half said they didn't know what caused their pain. A physician evaluation is important to properly diagnose the cause of joint pain.

Cracking One's Knuckles Causes Arthritis

False. Knuckle "cracking" has not been shown to be harmful or beneficial. The pop one hears when a knuckle is cracked isn't putting wear and tear on the joint. When a knuckle is cracked, it puts pressure on the fluid between the bones, and that releases a gas that makes a popping sound. Cracking sounds can also be heard if tendons snap over tissues because of minor adjustments in their gliding paths. Doing it won't lead to arthritis. However, some people with arthritis notice "cracking" sounds with joint movements, due to the snapping of irregular, swollen tissues.



Arthritis is Triggered by a Cold, Wet Climate

Most likely false. Studies that have looked at this phenomenon haven't shown that cold or wet weather brings on arthritis. However, many with arthritis bear a strong conviction that moving to a warmer climate has helped their condition.

Arthritis Pain can Predict a Change in the Weather

Most likely false. The idea that certain painful health conditions are affected by the weather is both widespread and ancient, dating back to at least Hippocrates in the fourth century B.C.; nevertheless, any medical studies on this phenomenon have been quite ambiguous. A drop in barometric pressure often precedes a storm, and the theory goes that a decrease in the air pressure can cause the tissues around the joints to swell, causing arthritic pain. However, pressure changes associated with storms are rather small, about equivalent to what a person experiences when going up an elevator in a tall building.

Those with Osteoarthritis Suffer from Inflammation of the Joints

False. Generally, when people think of arthritis, they think of inflammation. But with the particular form of arthritis known as osteoarthritis, it is not believed that inflammation plays much or any role. Other painful conditions of the joints and musculoskeletal system that are not associated with inflammation include fibromyalgia, muscular low back pain and muscular neck pain.

There's a Cure for Arthritis

False, but doctors may be close. Today, scientists have learned about the molecules that are involved in inflammatory diseases like arthritis and have developed ways to fight those molecules with medications. Scientists are also looking into whether people with arthritis continue to have improved symptoms after they stop taking medication. For osteoarthritis, the only current cure is joint replacement. A person's body doesn't have any way of re-growing cartilage once it has worn away, but surgically replacing it can provide substantial relief in people who have very advanced osteoarthritis.

Call Continuum today to schedule in-home care, and to get a partner who can assist with care for someone with arthritis, as well as ensure a caring person is there when a helping hand is needed.

Sources: EverydayHealth.com, WebMD, Arthritis Foundation