

# Recommendations to Manage Arthritis Pain

**Besides pain medications such as aspirin and acetaminophen (Tylenol) there are many ways to manage arthritis pain.**

- **Exercise.** Exercise can help maintain function and lessen pain. People with arthritis should always discuss exercise plans with their doctor. Some exercises may be off-limits for people with a particular type of arthritis or when joints are swollen and inflamed.
- **Hydrotherapy/Warm Water Therapy.** Warm water therapy can relax stiff and sore muscles. For example, morning stiffness can often be relieved with a hot shower or bath. Exercising in a pool, swim spa, or hot tub can be beneficial because water takes some weight off of painful joints. Also beneficial are hot packs, electric blankets, heating pads, and the use of a sauna.
- **Cold Therapy.** Cold therapy helps to relieve pain by numbing nerve endings in affected areas of the body. Cold compresses, wrapping a plastic bag filled with ice cubes, or frozen gel packs can be applied locally. Note that people who have Reynaud's phenomenon should not use this method of pain management.
- **Massage.** Massage brings warmth and relaxation to the painful area and reduces inflammation and swelling. As muscle tension is relaxed and circulation is increased, pain is decreased.



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- **Acupuncture.** A recent study showed that acupuncture provides pain relief, improves function for people with osteoarthritis of the knee, and serves as an effective complement to standard care.
- **Practice Relaxation.** The mind plays an important role in how one feels pain and responds to illness. Relaxation can give a sense of control and wellbeing that makes it easier to manage pain and may also lessen anxiety, depression and sleeping problems.
- **Progressive Relaxation/Creative Imagery.** Progressive relaxation involves lying on one's back to systematically tense and relax each part of the body. Following progressive relaxation, the mind can be engaged into imagining a pleasant and happy scene. As the mind is occupied with the scene, stress levels diminish, as do pain levels.
- **Rest.** Pain can also be an indicator of the need for rest. It is important to pay attention to the signal and allow the body the required time to recharge. Inflammation decreases during a restful phase; however, too much stillness can lead to muscle weakness. It is essential to strike a balance between rest and exercise.
- **Occupational Therapy.** Occupational therapists can assist with body mechanics (learning to move the body in ways that do not increase pain), joint protection techniques and adapting daily activities to conserve energy.
- **Consider Surgery.** When other treatment methods don't lessen the pain, or when moving and using one's joints becomes very difficult, surgery may be necessary. Joint replacement surgery has become more common over the years, and is regarded as a viable option when all else has failed.

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

*Sources: About.com Arthritis, Arthritis Foundation*