

Tips on How to Live Well with Arthritis

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Arthritis is an umbrella term for 120 diseases and conditions of the joints, surrounding tissues and connective tissues. Arthritis is a chronic disease that affects over 70 million Americans and is the leading cause of disability in the U.S. for ages 15 years and older. In Idaho, approximately 256,000 adults have doctor diagnosed arthritis and another 184,000 have chronic joint symptoms or “possible” arthritis. Arthritis can disrupt a person’s way of living, but the good news is there are ways to live well with arthritis.

The Arthritis Foundation recommends the following tips to help people live well with arthritis.

- **Exercise:** Exercise and physical activity can help people with arthritis feel less pain, move more easily, feel more energetic, and keep their muscles, bones, and joints healthy. The Center of Disease Control (CDC) recommends that people with arthritis exercise 30 minutes a day 3 times a week. To encourage people with arthritis to exercise, the Southeastern District Health Department’s Arthritis Program provides a free exercise class at their facility on 1901 Alvin Ricken Drive, in Pocatello. The next class session will begin on May 7, 2007, and will run through June 13th. The classes will be held on Mondays and Wednesdays 11:30 am-12:30 pm for six weeks. But remember to always consult with your physician before starting any exercise program.
- **Manage Weight:** It is important for people with arthritis to manage their weight by exercising and eating right, since excess weight can cause an increase risk of osteoarthritis in joints, increases damage to joints, increases pain, and increases the risk for other chronic disease.
- **Eat Healthy:** Eating healthy is important for everyone, but especially for someone who has arthritis. Research has shown that certain foods can reduce arthritis pain and improve symptoms.
- **Modify daily activities:** Just because a person has arthritis does not mean that they can’t participate in every day activities. They just need to be done differently, and an occupational therapist can help people with arthritis learn to do things differently to prevent pain.
- **Practice relaxation techniques:** Deep breathing, guided imagery, and yoga are all helpful relaxation techniques to manage arthritis pain.

- Keep a positive attitude: I know it is hard to keep a positive attitude when you are dealing with constant pain, but research has shown that people who stay positive can reduce their symptoms of pain.
- Apply heat or cold to source of pain: Heat and cold can be used for temporary relief from pain. When there is heat and swelling in the joint try cold. Different things work for different people.
- Get adequate amounts of sleep: I know it is difficult to get a good night's rest when you are dealing with pain, but it has been shown that poor quality of sleep can increase arthritis pain.
- Always consult with your doctor: It is important to consult with your doctor often about the symptoms you are dealing with. And remember "you have arthritis" is not a diagnosis. There are over 120 types of arthritis and, each of which has a different treatment. To get the right treatment you must get the right diagnosis. To help your doctor with the proper diagnosis it is helpful to provide him/her with information about your symptoms.

To further help people manage their arthritis pain; the SDHD's Arthritis Program will be holding an Arthritis & Fibromyalgia Expo in May and an Arthritis Self-Help Course in June. The Arthritis & Fibromyalgia Expo is held each year in May for Arthritis Awareness Month. The event provides arthritis information through a variety of displays and presentations by local health professionals. This year's event will be held on May 19th at the Southeastern District Health Department from 8:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. The Expo will feature guest speakers' rheumatologist, Dr. Ananda Walaliyadda, and Roger Hefflinger, PharmD, and displays by Hall Healthy Step (Compression, Hosiery, Orthopedic Shoes and Hosiery), Fitness Inc., Idaho Medical Imaging, and the Arthritis Foundation.

The Arthritis Foundation Self-Help Course is a six-week group education course that will meet once a week starting on Tuesday, June 5th at 4:30 p.m.-6:00 p.m. The program helps people with arthritis learn the skills they need to build their own self-management program that will help them become an active member of their health-care team, work better with their health-care providers and handle the day-to-day challenges of their disease.

Arthritis is a chronic disease that disrupts millions of lives each year, and the Southeastern District Health Department's Arthritis Program wants to assist people in the process of taking greater control of their arthritis by providing the Arthritis Foundation Exercise Classes, Arthritis Foundation Self-Help Course, and the Arthritis & Fibromyalgia Expo, because you can live well with arthritis. For additional information, contact Arthritis Program Coordinator, Tracy McCulloch at 239-5250 or the Arthritis Foundation at www.arthritis.org.