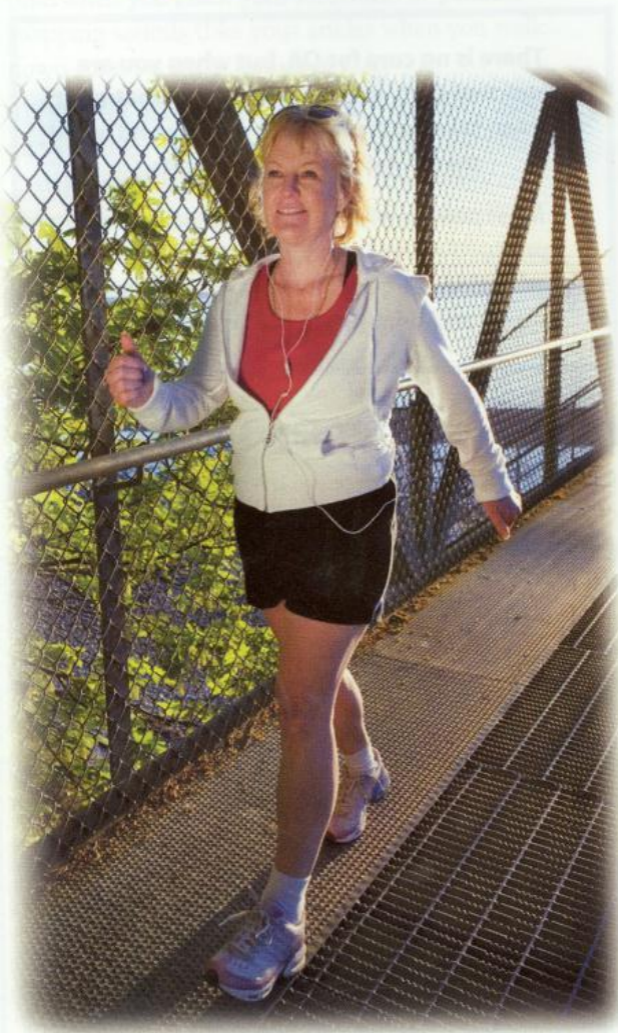




The Arthritis  
Society

# Osteoarthritis

KNOW YOUR OPTIONS



**ARTHRITIS**  **FIGHT IT!**

## A WORD ABOUT PAIN

Pain from osteoarthritis can be so intense and constant that it dominates your every waking moment (and can cause many sleepless nights). Due to pain, you may be unable to continue with your routine daily activities and you may become less active in an attempt to keep your joints as comfortable as possible. Unfortunately, this inactivity can then have negative effects on your muscles and joints. This can then lead to a loss of strength, reduced flexibility, and more pain. Therefore, good pain control is essential in the treatment of arthritis.

Persistently severe pain from arthritis requires a combination of therapies as no single management technique is powerful enough to provide non-stop pain relief. You need to discover what works for you. This often means trying many different therapies or combinations of therapies for prolonged pain relief.

In order to decrease your pain and maintain movement and function, it is essential that you become actively involved in developing your prescribed treatment plan.

## NON-MEDICATION THERAPIES

Non-medication therapies are a very important part of the treatment of osteoarthritis.

### Exercise

When done properly, exercise can help to decrease OA symptoms and make you feel better overall. If done improperly, exercise can "flare" your arthritis. Therefore, an exercise program should be done under the guidance of a trained physiotherapist. There are different types of exercises that you can do to lessen your pain and stiffness:

- **Range of motion exercises** reduce pain and stiffness and keep your joints moving. To achieve the most benefit these exercises should be done daily.
- **Strengthening exercises** maintain or increase muscle tone and protect your joints.

- **Moderate stretching exercises** help to relieve the pain and keep the muscles and tendons around an affected joint flexible. Your physiotherapist can guide you on what strengthening and stretching exercises are best and when they are appropriate.
- **Endurance exercises** strengthen your heart, give you energy, control your weight and help you feel better overall. These exercises include things like walking, swimming and cycling. It is best to avoid high impact exercises like step aerobics, jogging or kick boxing.

### Heat and Cold

**Heat** is one of the oldest treatments to provide relief from muscle and joint pain. When heat therapy is used it can reduce joint pain, stiffness and muscle spasm. Heat promotes blood circulation, which nourishes and detoxifies muscle fibers. You can purchase "hot packs" made of silicate gel, beans, or corn (i.e. magic bags) or use a hot water bottle. Place a damp towel on the skin to improve heat conduction and apply the "hot pack" for 10-15 minutes. Heat should be comfortably warm. The heat should not feel like it is burning your skin. If heat is too hot, add one or two towels between the heat source and body part, or remove heat. Continuously inspect the area that is being heated. The area will appear red and possibly sweaty. If, however, the heat has caused pain in the area, it should be removed and discontinued until you consult with your physiotherapist. Heat can be re-applied after leaving it off for the same period of time for which it was applied. All redness should be gone before re-applying. In order to avoid making symptoms worse, heat should not be applied to an already inflamed joint.

**Cold** applied to inflamed joints reduces pain and swelling by constricting blood flow. Gel packs, a bag of frozen vegetables, or crushed ice in a bag are good "cold packs". Place a moist towel between the pack and the skin to improve conduction of cold and apply the cold pack for 10-15 minutes. The skin underlying the cold pack will redden; check the skin frequently for signs of over-cooling (blanched, white skin). Leave at least two hours between cold applications. You should not use ice if you have circulatory problems such as Raynaud's disease.