

The good and bad news about osteoarthritis

The bad news is that approximately one in ten Canadians suffers from osteoarthritis. Osteoarthritis (OA) occurs when the composition of the joint cartilage changes so that it has less water content, and therefore loses its ability to absorb weight-bearing forces. Over time, especially after age 40, this cartilage starts to fray and become rough. You may notice pain or stiffness in a joint, or swelling, loss of joint movement or deformity.

But, there is good news. The Canadian Academy of Manipulative Therapy has ten ways you can prevent OA or at least minimize its effects:

1. Maintain your ideal body **weight**. Women who are overweight have almost four times the risk of knee OA, and it's five times the risk in men. When you lose weight, you'll decrease the stress on the joints in your spine, hips, knees and feet.
2. Talk to a **physiotherapist** about what exercises will be helpful for you. Your therapist can give specific advice regarding your posture, and about modifying or returning to activity. If you have a muscle imbalance or a joint movement problem, these can be treated with hands on manual therapy and a specific strengthening and stretching program prescribed by your CAMT physical therapist.
3. Be **careful** at work and in your sports/hobbies. Wear protective equipment as needed, avoid repetitive movements and sustained positions, and get help if a task is too much for you to handle.
4. Start an **exercise** program. Exercise strengthens the muscles that support and protect your joints. This reduces the friction and wear and tear on the joint. Low impact exercise such as water aerobics, swimming, and bike ergometers minimize compression in the joints. Do something you enjoy, especially if it involves a friend, as you'll be more likely to stick with it.
5. **Don't overdo it**. Avoid the 'weekend warrior' habit. Exercising a few times per week, for 20-30 minutes, is better for your body than long infrequent sessions. Listen to your body; if you have pain for over an hour after you exercise, you need to decrease your intensity or duration in your exercise program.
6. Keep **moving**. Don't stay in one position for too long, such as at work or when relaxing. Movement helps to keep the joints lubricated, which helps with joint nutrition and health.
7. **Rest** frequently during the day and for short durations to take the load off your joints.
8. Use good **posture**. This will reduce the strain throughout the body, especially in the spine, the jaw, the hips, knees, and feet.
9. Wear proper **footwear**. Good shoes should have supportive heel, good shock absorption and be wide enough in the toe area so toes aren't compressed.
10. Talk to a **doctor** about your arthritis. A doctor can differentiate osteoarthritis from other types of arthritis, such as rheumatoid arthritis.

Additional information, including a research document written by Anita Gross, F-CAMT and associate clinical professor at McMaster University, is available at www.manipulativetherapy.org.

For interviews with a CAMT member in your community, please contact:

Tim Winchester
Colour
902.722.3247
tim@colour.ca