

## Arthritis – exercising pain away

*Self Care health facts column*

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It's almost certain that you, someone in your family or a close friend will have some form of arthritis.

Arthritis is Australia's major cause of pain and disability. It directly affects around 4 million people and impacts indirectly on many millions more. It's an enormous economic cost burden on the community too – collectively we pay some \$24 billion every year – and the extra hidden social and emotional costs are immeasurable.

Arthritis is often thought of as a single disease, but it's really an umbrella term used to describe well over a hundred different but related medical conditions – conditions which are similar to the extent that they all involve our bones and muscles and particularly the joints where two or more of our bones meet.

The Pharmaceutical Society (PSA) has prepared information and materials to help ensure arthritis can be managed effectively. These materials include three fact cards on the most common forms of arthritis – osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis and gout – which together account for around 95% of all cases.

Also, Arthritis Australia (the peak patient support organisation) has this year developed an interactive website – [www.MyJointPain.org.au](http://www.MyJointPain.org.au) – to help everyone with joint pain and osteoarthritis. The site provides evidence-based management information and can help you choose the most appropriate treatment options.

In so far as medicines are concerned, as the primary aim of treatment of osteoarthritis (OA) is to reduce pain, simple pain relievers are the first choice; and paracetamol is usually the best option.

For optimum results paracetamol should be taken not just now and again but routinely – 3 g to 4 g per day. This can be either two 500 mg tablets up to four times daily, or two of the higher strength (*Panadol Osteo*) three times daily.

As with all chronic conditions, particularly when conventional therapies are less than perfect in every case, there is plenty of interest in alternative or complementary treatments.

There is some evidence from clinical trials that glucosamine sulphate (1500 mg/day) decreases the pain associated with OA of the knee joint. There may be benefit for other joints as well; however, it should be noted that results from later studies have not been universally supportive of the early trials.



Photo by Veera Matveeva

Gout is the only form of arthritis where it is likely that some foods can aggravate the condition, but there is evidence that some foods will actually help other inflammatory forms of arthritis such as rheumatoid arthritis.

Specifically, the beneficial foods are those rich in what we know as omega-3 fatty acids, and the best sources of the omega-3 are oily fish. Olive oils and oils and spreads from flaxseed, canola and wheat germ are also beneficial.

Supplements of fish oil, and the more concentrated krill oil, are now available if fish is not a regular on your menu. Your pharmacist will be able to advise you on the most appropriate product and the correct dose.

World Arthritis Day will be celebrated on 12 October and it gives us an opportunity to reflect not only on the problem, but also, in a positive way, how we can control the symptoms and enable people with arthritis to lead normal active lives. The slogan for 2013–14 is 'Living Better, Ageing Well' And whatever your age, being active can help you cope with symptoms. Walking, dancing, cycling, swimming and other water exercises can all be tailor made to suit you. There are other activity options, too, on the MyJointPain website.

Meanwhile, the arthritis fact cards are available from pharmacies around Australia providing the PSA Self Care health information. Check out the website at [www.psa.org.au](http://www.psa.org.au) and click on 'Self Care' then 'Find a Self Care Pharmacy'. There are also a few other fact cards with helpful advice for sufferers of arthritis. These include *Pain Relievers*, *Preventing Falls*, *Relaxation Techniques* and *Weight and Health*.