



# ARTHRITIS MYTHS AND FACTS

**What You *Think* You Know Could Be Hurting You**

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## Introduction

Arthritis affects nearly 40 million Americans, and since we are living longer than ever before, the number of cases of arthritis will grow over the next decades. We need more of a focus on this disease, and how to prevent it or treat it effectively. This needs to become a cornerstone of our health care.

In this guide, you will find many of the most common myths about arthritis, and the real facts. Use what you learn to prevent arthritis, or gain safe, effective treatment, so you can maintain your mobility and independence until well into your senior years.

So let's get started on your journey to better health.

## **Common Myths and Facts about Arthritis**

### **1 - MYTH: There are only a couple of types of arthritis, Osteoarthritis (OA) and Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA)**

FACT:

OA and RA are the 2 most common forms, but there are more than 100 arthritic conditions, also referred to as rheumatic conditions. They include:

- psoriatic arthritis
- bursitis
- gout
- lupus
- fibromyalgia

... and many more.

OA (Osteoarthritis) is the result of wear and tear on the joints and injury.

RA (Rheumatoid Arthritis) is the result of inflammation in the body. It is an autoimmune disorder in which the body starts to attack itself, particularly the lining of the joints in the body, leading to joint damage and severe deformity if the RA is not treated.

### **2 - MYTH: Arthritis only happens to the elderly**

FACT: While it is true that as one ages, the prevalence of both OA and RA increases, the fact is that arthritis can afflict any person of any age.

### **3 - MYTH: Men and women suffer equally from RA**

FACT: Women are 9 times more likely to get RA than men. However, men are more likely to get moderate to severe RA.

#### **4 - MYTH: Arthritis will usually begin at middle age**

FACT: According to the Arthritis Foundation, RA tends to start between the ages of 30 and 50. OA will occur most often after age 45, except in the cases of athletic people, sports-related injuries, and/or car accidents.

#### **5 - MYTH: There is nothing you can do to prevent arthritis.**

FACT: There is a lot you can do to prevent arthritis.

##### **OA (Osteoarthritis)**

- Protect your joints
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Exercise regularly to stay flexible
- Perform weight-bearing exercise such as walking and aerobics to strengthen bones, muscles and joints
- Protect yourself from injury
- Avoid unnecessary risks likely to cause injury, such as skiing
- Maintain strong muscles to support your joints, such as a solid core to protect your back
- Wear good shoes in order to avoid bad posture and walking habits, which can cause uneven wear on the joints, which in some cases will result in pain and perhaps even the need for joint replacement

##### **RA (Rheumatoid Arthritis)**

- Protect your joints
- Eat a healthful diet
- Eat an anti-inflammatory diet, that is, one which does not cause irritation to the body
- Manage your stress levels
- Exercise regularly
- Maintain a heart-healthy lifestyle



These tips will also help to minimize joint damage and disability.

## **6 - MYTH: Joint pain is inevitable as you age**

**FACT:** Stiff or creaking knees and hips, and stiff hand aren't necessarily normal aches and pains that come with age. The pain might signify arthritis, which can be treated. With OA, the pain will be mainly in the back, hips and knees. With RA, the pain will usually be in the wrists and hands, and the ankles and feet.

If you are suffering from stiffness, lack of mobility, or joints that are painful, red, or swollen, discuss your symptoms and pain relief options with your doctor.

## **7 - MYTH: There are no tests to diagnose OA (Osteoarthritis)**

**FACT:** There are a number of lab tests that can determine if your aches and pains are OA or not.

These include:

### *Joint Aspiration*

In this test, the doctor will use a fine needle to remove fluid from the affected joint in order to examine the fluid to see if there are any crystals or other signs that the joints have deteriorated.

### *X-ray*

The wear and tear of OA, such as bone and cartilage changes, can be shown with x-rays and other imaging techniques.

### *MRI*

An MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) will give a two-dimensional view of a joint, helping give a clearer picture of the soft tissues, such as cartilage, as well as the bones in the joint being imaged.

These tests, plus a family history and recent medical records can all help the doctor arrive at a definitive diagnosis of OA.

## **8 - MYTH: Cracking your knuckles or ‘popping’ your shoulders or back can cause arthritis**

FACT: Knuckle cracking has not been shown to be harmful or beneficial. “Popping” can be harmful if it leads to the tendons getting slacker and not supporting the joint properly.

The snap, crackle and pop sound of knees is known as crepitus. The tendons are stretching over the joint. This is not necessarily a sign of trouble, but it is important to note that some people eventually get a thinning of the bone as they age, a condition known as osteoporosis.

New bone is forming in our bodies all the time. Weight-bearing exercise will help generate healthy new bone. Weaker bone can leave holes and spurs, that is, bony parts sticking out where they shouldn’t, which can injure or otherwise affect muscles, tendons and ligaments, and cause pain.

If you notice you are creaking more or experiencing pain in one or two places only when you move, consider doing more weight-bearing exercise and relaxing the muscles with natural remedies such as a heating pad, warm bath, and topical arthritis creams.



**9 - MYTH: Arthritis is triggered by a cold, wet climate**

FACT: So far, there is no proof of this. However, the cold and damp is more likely to make people shiver, which tightens the muscles and can lead to pain. If you think your pain is associated with bad weather, try heat therapy such as a heating pad, warm soak, or warming topical cream.

Many people move to a warmer climate because they feel it offers relief from their pain. An area with little or no snow will certainly protect you from slipping and injuring your joints or falling due to the snow.

**10 - MYTH: Arthritis pain signals a change in the weather**

FACT: So far, there is no proof of this. However, a drop in barometric pressure often occurs before a storm, so it is possible that a decrease in the air pressure can cause the tissues around the joints to swell and cause pain. However, these pressure changes are usually no greater than going up in an elevator in a tall building.

**11 - MYTH: All forms of arthritis involve inflammation**

FACT: RA involves inflammation, not OA. Other arthritic conditions that do not involve inflammation include fibromyalgia, lower back pain and neck pain due to OA.

In RA, joint inflammation is one of the key symptoms.

There can be pain in the joints and muscles in *fibromyalgia*, but it may not be caused by inflammation. Therefore, fibromyalgia does not damage your joints the way that arthritis can

## **12 - MYTH: There's a cure for arthritis**

With so many different rheumatic conditions, many do not have effective treatments yet, let alone cures. However, as researchers learn more about the processes of inflammation in the body, auto-immune disorders, pain and aging, they have developed a range of strategies for dealing with OA, RA, gout, fibromyalgia, and more.

Many of these treatments are natural and therefore pose fewer risks of side effects than prescription medications.

For RA, for example, the 'biologics' used to treat it can trigger serious reactions, and one treatment can cost as much as \$10,000 US, leading to what is now being termed the 'financial toxicity' of certain treatments for certain diseases such as RA and cancer.



*Figure 1: Joint replacement materials for a hip*

In terms of OA, the only real 'cure' is joint replacement if the pain is too severe and the quality of life is severely compromised. However, there are always risks involved with any surgery, and often the outcome is not as good as the patient had hoped.

Those considering joint replacement surgery should do their research carefully.

Studies have also shown that those who do 'pre-hab' as well as re-hab, that is, follow a structured exercise program *before*, as well as after their surgery, tend to have a better outcome than those who do not.

### **13 - MYTH: Most people with OA need surgery**

FACT: OA is the most common form of arthritis and affects 27 million Americans, but surgery is *not* beneficial for most patients. It is usually a last resort when there is severe joint damage and other medical treatments have failed, or the person has severely impaired mobility.

Replacing damaged joints with artificial ones can improve movement, relieve pain and boost independence. However, it is important to note that the recovery period can be long and results not always predictable. Most artificial joints do not function the same as your own natural joints, and they only last about 10 years.

Removing bone spurs, and re-aligning joints can also improve OA for many patients. A rheumatologist can outline all of your options so you can decide which treatment(s) are right for you.

### **14 - MYTH: Those with OA have stiffness all the time**

FACT: Pain and stiffness are the most common symptoms of OA, but are usually most common in the morning when a person first wakes up. It should usually resolve itself within a few minutes and disappear completely within half an hour.

It is improved by movement and activity, which loosens the joints, and helps maintain mobility. However, by the end of the day, the pain may start to worsen.

The only exception is OA in the hands, which can last all day.

RA produces pain that may last for several hours after waking, or persist all day.

### **15 - MYTH: People with arthritis should avoid exercise**

FACT: A growing body of research has shown that anyone with OA should engage in a regular, low-impact exercise program.

Good choices include low intensity aerobic, yoga, tai chi, light weights, water walking or aquarobics.

Exercise keeps joints flexible and toned muscles keep joints stable. It can also help people slim down, which takes pressure off the joints.

In terms of RA, exercise is essential in order to minimize the damage that RA can cause as it attacks the joints. Be sure to wear supportive shoes.

## **16 - MYTH: Arthritis can only be treated with pain medications**

FACT: There are many natural treatments for effective arthritis pain relief. While some may carry certain side effects, these will usually be mild compared to the typical over the counter pain relievers used, which can cause gastrointestinal bleeding.

Alternating light activity with short periods of rest (don't rest for too long, though, or you will stiffen up), and applying topical treatments can help.

Other ways to treat arthritis pain include:

- Losing weight
- Massage
- Heat therapy
- Cold therapy
- Orthotics to support joints
- Topical creams



**17 - MYTH: Tylenol (Acetaminophen) is not effective against arthritis**

FACT: Tylenol is a popular pain reliever that can work for some forms of pain, such as that of OA.

However, if you have RA, it will not help as much because it does not have the same anti-inflammatory activity to decrease swelling as aspirin does.

If you have stomach ulcers or kidney problems, acetaminophen (Tylenol) is generally considered a better choice instead of aspirin, which can cause gastrointestinal issues such as internal bleeding.

However, acetaminophen poses a significant risk for liver damage if too much is taken, even a mild overdose. *Most overdoses are unintentional* because Tylenol is such a popular ingredient in a range of over the counter and even prescription drugs.

*So read all labels carefully and follow all dosing instructions exactly.*

**18 - MYTH: Glucosamine and Chondroitin have been proven to offer arthritis pain relief**

FACT: These 2 supplements are commonly recommended for arthritis pain relief and are marketed as “Move Free” and similar brands. However, studies are conflicting as to whether or not it really works. Many researchers dismiss it as no better than placebo (pronounced plah-SEE-boh), that is, a sugar pill. However, it is important to note that the placebo effect has been *shown to work in 33%* of medical cases!

It is important to note that chondroitin is sometimes derived from shellfish, so anyone who is allergic needs to check the label carefully. Side effects for the general population include mild upset stomach, heartburn and drowsiness. If you don't feel any relief within a few months, stop taking it.



**19 - MYTH: Red hot chili peppers to treat arthritis is just snake oil**

FACT: The active ingredient found in chili peppers, *capsaicin*, is an effective topical treatment for easing the pain and stiffness of arthritis.

Clinical trials support its use for OA and it can be purchased over the counter. Side effects are generally

mild, but can include burning, stinging, and redness.

Apply on unbroken skin and wash your hands well after applying. Be sure to keep your hands away from your face and particularly your eyes after you have used the cream.

It may take up to 2 weeks for the cream to offer effective relief.

**20 - MYTH: Joint injections can be given any time you want extra arthritis pain relief**

FACT: Joint injections all have potential side effects, so they are not a first-line treatment for arthritis pain relief. Instead, try acetaminophen, aspirin, lifestyle measures, and topical treatments.

There are two main types of injections, usually used for OA such as that in the knee. They are:

1-glucocorticoids

2-hyaluronic acid

*Glucocorticoids* are a class of steroid.

Common steroids include prednisone and methylprednisolone.

Steroids can reduce inflammation and pain when injected into arthritic knees, but should only be used 3-4 times per year due to side effects, which include nausea, vomiting, headache, and high blood sugar, very dangerous for anyone with Type 2 diabetes. Steroids are also used to treat RA.

*Hyaluronic acid* is a supplement that replaces the natural fluids in the joints to allow easier movement. The injections can be repeated in 6 months if the response is good. It helps provide cushioning in the joints for less wear and tear on them.

**21 - MYTH: You should wait until your pain is severe before seeing the doctor about your arthritis**

FACT: The sooner you identify the causes of your pain, the better.

In addition, RA treatments are most effective from the onset, rather than allowing the arthritis to progress, causing severe damage to affected joints which can't be reversed.

There are a number of available treatments that have been proven effective, both natural and pharmaceutical.

A swollen joint is usually a sign that damage is occurring. Exercise, alternating with short periods of rest, and trying to live as normal a life as possible, will help you stay mobile.

Carry a cane in the hand opposite the affected leg joint, in order to support the joint and minimize pressure on it. See your doctor regularly to determine if the condition is worsening, and to discuss all of your pain relief options.



**22 - MYTH: Diet makes no difference with arthritic conditions**

**FACT:** The word diet has two meanings, a plan to lose weight, and one's food choices. Both are important when it comes to arthritic conditions.

The more weight we carry, the more pressure we put on our joints.

Did you know that losing 1 pound can take *4 pounds* of pressure off your knees as we walk, especially going down stairs?

Depending on the type of arthritic condition you have, your diet can have a major impact on your pain and discomfort. For example in gout, those who have it should avoid foods with *purines* in them, which can trigger gout attacks and severe pain.

**Foods with purines include:**

- Organ meats, such as liver, kidneys, sweetbreads, and brains
- Meats, including bacon, beef, pork, and lamb
- Game meats such as venison and bison
- Anchovies, sardines, herring, mackerel, and scallops
- Beer



Foods that are *beneficial* include low fat dairy like milk and yogurt.

For other forms of arthritis, an anti-inflammatory diet is suggested.

**Foods to *avoid* include:**

- Red meat
- Gluten, a protein found in wheat
- White sugar, and any foods with added sugar
- Naturally sugary foods like honey and agave
- Too much full-fat dairy, like cheese and ice cream
- Aspartame (NutraSweet, Equal) and *all artificial sweeteners*
- Too much salt
- Monosodium Glutamate (MSG), a flavor-enhancer and meat tenderizer commonly used in Chinese food

**Foods to add to your diet include:**

- Omega-3 fatty acids, such as wild-caught fish like salmon
- Blueberries
- Leafy greens
- Green tea
- Garlic

These foods are also rich in *antioxidants*, which have powerful disease fighting and anti-aging properties. The main cause of aging now is what is termed “oxidative stress” on the body. Antioxidants fight oxidative stress to help you look and feel younger.

## **23 - MYTH: Acupuncture has no scientific basis in relation to OA**

FACT: Trials have shown real physiological changes to the body as a result of using acupuncture.

Acupuncture is the ancient practice of inserting thin needles into specific body areas. It is used in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), which tries to restore the flow of qi, pronounced CHEE, or energy in the body.

Practitioners believe disease is caused by qi being blocked. Allowing it to flow freely along the body pathways (called meridians) helps to restore the balance of energy and promote health.

Research has shown that *natural pain-relieving neurotransmitters* like endorphins and enkephalins are released during acupuncture sessions.

For those who are not too fond of the idea of needles, **acupressure** works in a similar way, with the practitioner massaging the special points with their fingers instead of inserting needles.

## Conclusion

There are many myths and miscommunications about arthritis.

As you have seen, some of the common myths about arthritis can be positively harmful.

With more people living longer than ever before, it is not just a case of duration of life, but quality as well. Staying mobile and independent is the goal, no matter what your age.

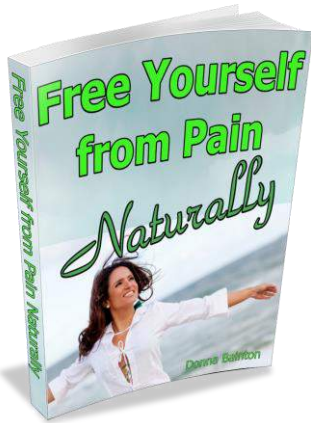
Now that you have discovered 23 of the most common myths about arthritis, and the actual facts, use what you have learned to prevent arthritis.

If you already have arthritis, your goal will be to find safe, effective treatments that suit your lifestyle and budget, to keep you as pain-free as possible.

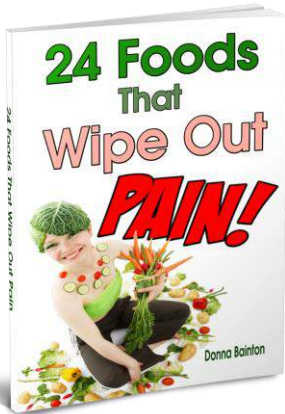
To your best health!

~ **Donna**

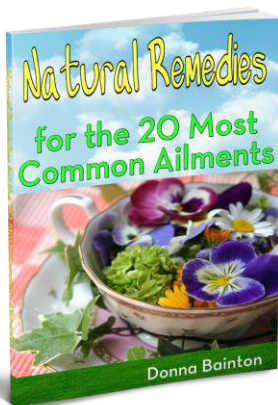
## Resources



[Free Yourself from Pain Naturally eBook](#)



[24 Foods that Wipe Out Pain eBook](#)



[Natural Remedies for the 20 Most Common Ailments](#)

## About the Author



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Donna Bainton has been an author, speaker and naturopathic consultant since 1990.

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## A Note from the Author

Hi there! I hope you've enjoyed the information presented here, and will benefit from it!

If I can be of any help to you, please feel free to [contact me](#) or connect with me on [Facebook](#).

I'd love to hear your thoughts and suggestions for topics that would make your life easier, better or more fun!

All the Best,  
**Donna**

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