



A Publication of the Presbytery of West Virginia

520 2nd Ave, South Charleston, WV 25303 . wvpresbytery.org . 304-744-7634



Vol 3 Issue 3 ❖ March 2020

Joint Health: 10 Tips For Seniors

By Ashley Manor

The saying "If you don't use it, you will lose it" is true when it comes to your body's joints. Of course, using them is often easier said than done as you get older. Even if you are unable to do moderate to heavy physical activity, maintaining flexibility in your joints is essential, especially as your joints age.

How Joints Work

So, how exactly do the joints work, and why are they so important? Joints are the areas between bones in your body that allow the bones to move in relation to one another. Joints have different structures and functions, including:

Cartilaginous joints (which are held together by cartilage and can slightly move)

Fibrous joints (joints that are held into place by fibrous connective tissue and therefore cannot move)

Synovial joints (joints with synovial cavities that hold the fluid that gets secreted by the synovial membrane)

Since joints are subject to a lot of movement and are weight bearing, they require cushioning to keep them intact. This is why we have cartilage surrounding our joints. Cartilage is the smooth connective tissue found on the ends of our bones that cushions and supports our joints' abilities to move.

Tips For Keeping Aging Joints Healthy

With time comes wear and tear. Years of walking, running, and exercising can cause cartilage to break down, which results in chronic inflammation, which further contributes to the breakdown of cartilage around the joints. If not caught in time and properly treated, cartilage can wear away entirely, and the bone joints can rub together.

Bone spurs (which are minuscule bony projections) can occur when the joints are damaged by osteoarthritis, which creates a wearing down of the cartilage that leads to the bones rubbing together.

It is best to avoid cartilage breakdown and joint damage, and the best way to do so is by being aware of what is going on in your body. The following are 10 ways that senior adults can be proactive about their joint health regardless of whether or not they display symptoms of osteoarthritis (OA) or other bone diseases that cause joint damage.



1. **Use Padding:** If you love being active, that's great! However, you need to keep in mind that even minor falls can sometimes lead to unexpected joint damage. As goofy as you think you might look, wearing knee and elbow pads while doing activities like roller skating or ice skating can help protect your joints from damage sustained during unanticipated slips and falls.

2. **Maintain a Healthy Weight:** This is easier said than done for many people, but maintaining a healthy weight is critical for keeping our joints healthy. Since our joints are weight-bearing, excess weight can place additional strain on the joints in our spines, knees, and hips.

3. **Do Light Warm-Ups to Activate Your Joints:** How many times a week do you stretch your muscles? Senior citizens should be stretching at least three times per week in order to enhance their balance and flexibility. Stretching is best done when your muscles are already warmed up a little bit. Going for a ten-minute walk to generate a little bit of heat in your muscles can loosen up your joints and the tendons and ligaments that surround them.

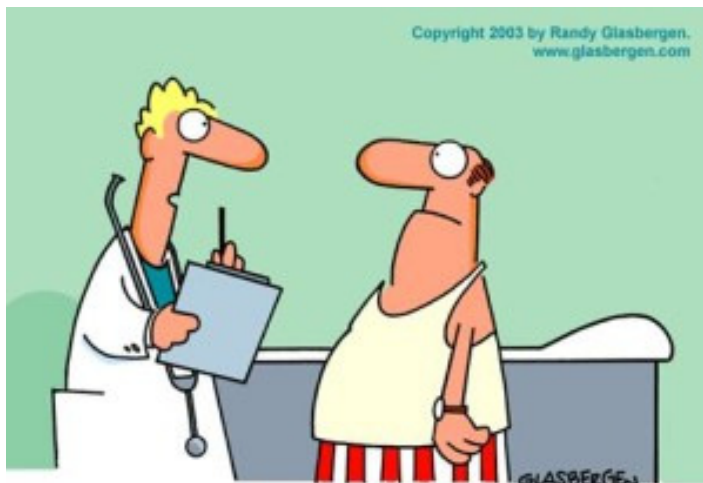
4. **Try Low-Impact Exercises:** As you get older, you might find yourself having to switch from your favorite high-impact exercise activities (such as running or lifting weights) to low-impact activities. High-impact activities put a lot of stress and strain on your joints, and this can cause a lot of painful wear and tear on your joints and cartilage over time. If you start noticing a lot of joint pain when you exercise, try doing something that has a lower impact, such as swimming, bicycling, walking, or yoga.

5. **Pump Yourself Up:** The stronger your muscles are, the better shape your joints will stay in. Any amount of muscle strength makes a difference, so it can really be beneficial to do some strength training.

6. **Ramp Up Your Range of Motion:** If you have joint issues, you most likely suffer from a lacking range of motion. Pain in the cervical and spinal joints can make it difficult to turn your head to the right and left or bend it forward or backward. Degeneration of cartilage and joints in the elbows and knees can make adduction and abduction strenuous and limited.

7. **Avoid Overdoing It On NSAIDs:** Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as Naproxen and Ibuprofen can temporarily relieve pain from damaged joints, but relief is only temporary and might actually lead to more severe problems with your joints.

8. **Consume Natural Anti-Inflammatory Agents:** In addition to taking helpful supplements, you might want to add more anti-inflammatory foods to your diet. Foods like turmeric, fish (due to their containing omega-3s), artichoke, cranberries, goji berries, and blueberries are all known to help reduce inflammation throughout the body.



"What fits your busy schedule better, exercising one hour a day or being dead 24 hours a day?"



What's so bad about preservatives in food? At my age I need all the preservatives I can get!

9. **Work On Maintaining Proper Posture:** Do you tend to slouch? Many of us do.

The fact of the matter is that we live in a sedentary society where sitting has become the norm. Many of us struggle with hunched postures, and this can put a lot of stress on the spinal and cervical joints. Maintaining a proper posture can alleviate some of this physical stress and keep our joints healthy.

10. **Know Your Limitations:** Last, but certainly not least, is the importance of knowing your limits. If you absolutely cannot walk for more than 20 minutes, don't. If you are doing a certain yoga pose but find it to be too painful, ease yourself out of it and take a rest. Push yourself only to your limits, not beyond, and remain mindful of how your body is feeling before, during, and after any exercise.

There is no magical fountain of youth that can keep us healthy, even though we sometimes like to hold out hope. We can, however, take proactive measures to ensure that our bodies do not sustain damage that ages them in advance and causes us years of agonizing pain and discomfort. Your joint health matters, so if you start to notice some stiffness or aching in your joints, consider what changes you might need to make and enlist the help of your doctor and/or physical therapist.