

Press Release

For immediate release

Tips for Managing Arthritis When Staying at Home

(New York City, May 20, 2020). In New York City and surrounding areas, people have displayed good judgment and stepped up to the challenge, staying at home to stop the spread of coronavirus. Although many locations are beginning to see a slow return to the “new normal,” many doctors’ offices are only open on a limited basis. Elective surgeries, such as joint replacement, are still on hold in some locations.

Many people with arthritis have been unable to have physical therapy appointments, injections at their doctor’s office, or even joint replacement surgery for pain relief. Even when elective surgeries resume, there will be a waiting period due to all the procedures that were postponed. But people can take action now to relieve arthritis pain, according to Geoffrey Westrich, MD, director of research in the Adult Reconstruction and Joint Replacement Service at Hospital for Special Surgery (HSS).

“Adapting good practices daily can help many people feel better,” he says. “Although it may be tempting to spend much of the time sitting on the couch watching TV or streaming on a laptop, one should take frequent breaks. Engaging in mild exercise and moving more can help people feel better.”

Since staying home, the average American household has been watching an additional eight hours of television each week, according to a recent Comcast survey, for a weekly total of 66 hours!

“Staying physically and mentally active is important to maintain good health when staying at home,” Dr. Westrich says. “Getting yourself moving is actually good for people with arthritis. And of course, it’s beneficial for your heart and your overall health. If you sit around too much, your joints can become stiff and your muscles get deconditioned. This puts more stress on an arthritic knee or hip, and that can cause more pain.”

For those working in front of a computer most of the day, Dr. Westrich advises people get up every half hour and walk around for at least five minutes. In addition to helping to prevent stiff joints, it helps avoid back pain that comes from sitting too much.

Dr. Westrich has additional recommendations for people dealing with arthritis:

- Do mild exercises to strengthen the muscles around an arthritic joint. For example, straight leg raises from a lying down or sitting position are a simple exercise that most people can do to strengthen the muscles around their knee.

- Remain active by engaging in non-impact activities, such as riding a stationary exercise bicycle or taking a safe walk outside.
- Even at home, be careful not to overdo physical activities. People may want to go on a cleaning spree or declutter a closet, but too much bending, kneeling, and lifting could make joint pain worse.
- If climbing up and down stairs causes pain, cut back. Be mindful of how you're moving and take one step at a time if it helps.
- Take an over-the-counter pain medication unless it causes stomach or other problems. If you have a prescription, make sure you follow your doctor's instructions.
- Use cold or heat to make a joint feel better. However, if a joint is hot and swollen, make sure you use a *cold* pack. Put a cloth or thin towel under the cold pack. Never put ice directly on your skin.
- Use an aid, such as cane, to relieve pressure on a knee or hip, when needed.
- Try to maintain a healthy diet. Keeping your weight down avoids stress on a joint.
- Try meditation, mindful breathing, or progressive relaxation to help relieve stress and feel better. A number of apps are available for this.
- Make sure there are no hazards in your home that could lead to a fall. Use a cane if needed for better stability, make sure rugs are secured to the floor, maintain good lighting and be careful if you get out of bed in the middle of the night. Grab bars in the bathroom and other devices can make it easier to perform activities of daily living with an arthritic joint. For more tips on fall prevention in the home, visit: http://geoffreywestrichmd.blogspot.com/2018/11/fall-prevention-measures-can-prevent_9.html
- Try to maintain a positive attitude. Remember, we are all in this together. The pandemic will end eventually, and we will get through this.

To see a video of Dr. Westrich with exercise tips, visit:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=niOY8GusK4o>