

Living with arthritis

More than 40 million Americans suffer from some form of arthritis. Half of all people over the age of 65 have some form of the disorder.

Many with arthritis suffer from chronic pain that limits their ability to perform daily activities. But there are a number of treatments and management options available that can help you to live a normal life.

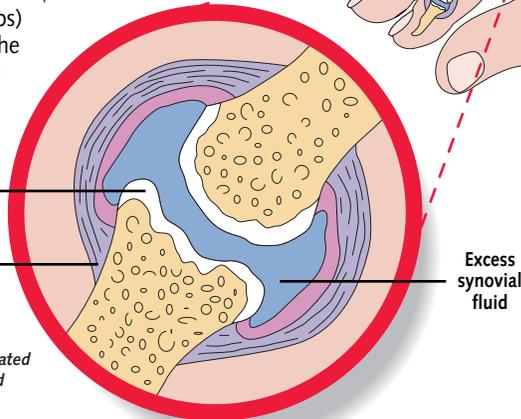
A study in the November 24, 1999, issue of *JAMA* reports on the use of a medication that treats symptoms of **rheumatoid arthritis**, one of the most debilitating forms of arthritis (see definition on this page).

WHAT IS ARTHRITIS?

The word **arthritis** means inflammation of the joints. The term is used to refer to more than 100 diseases that can cause pain, stiffness, and swelling in the joints. Some of these diseases may affect not only the joints, but also other parts of the body, such as muscles, bones, tendons, ligaments, and internal organs. Two of the most common forms of arthritis are **osteoarthritis** (wearing away of the protective cartilage of the joints, usually in the knees and hips) and **rheumatoid arthritis** (the immune system attacks the lining of the joints).

Eroded cartilage

Inflamed tissues



Source: *The Human Body: An Illustrated Guide to Its Structure, Function, and Disorders* (D K Publishing, 1995)

COMMON WARNING SIGNS OF ARTHRITIS:

If you have any of the following symptoms, see your doctor:

- Swelling in 1 or more joints
- Morning stiffness lasting 30 minutes or longer
- Persistent joint pain or tenderness
- Not being able to move a joint in the normal way
- Redness or warmth in a joint
- Weight loss, fever, or weakness, and joint pain that cannot be explained

HOW TO COPE WITH ARTHRITIS PAIN:

- Get 8 to 10 hours of sleep at night
- Be consistent when taking pain medications prescribed by your doctor
- Keep a daily diary of pain and mood changes to share with your doctor
- Eat a healthy diet to reduce weight, if you are overweight
- Join a support group
- Stay informed about treatments for arthritis pain

TREATMENT:

- **Physical exercise** – helps reduce joint pain and stiffness; increases flexibility, muscle strength, and endurance
- **Well-balanced diet** – helps to maintain a healthy body weight; extra weight puts more pressure on joints and can aggravate some forms of arthritis
- **Heat and cold therapies** – can help reduce the pain and inflammation of some forms of arthritis
- **Medications** – provide relief from pain and inflammation; types of medications can vary by patient and the condition
- **Rest and relaxation** – maintain a balance between rest and activity every day
- **Assistive devices** (splints or braces) – can help support weakened joints or allow them to rest
- **Surgery** – may be necessary in some cases to repair damaged joints

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases Information Clearinghouse
National Institutes of Health
1 AMS Circle
Bethesda, MD 20892-3675
or www.nih.gov/niams
- Arthritis Foundation
800/283-7800 or www.arthritis.org

INFORM YOURSELF:

To find this and previous *JAMA* Patient Pages, check out the AMA's Web site at www.ama-assn.org/consumer.htm.

Additional Sources: National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases, National Institute on Aging, Arthritis Foundation

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