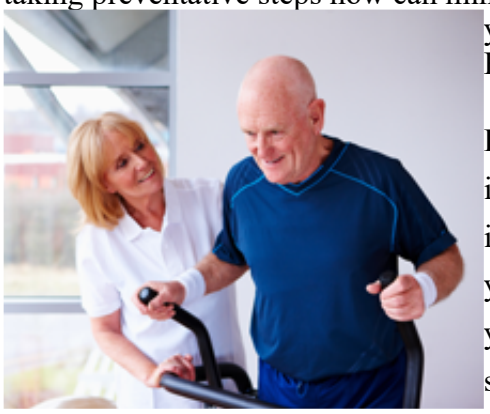
Your Employee and Family Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Avoiding the aches of Osteoarthritis

If that spring in your step is a little creaky, stiff or sore, you may be starting to feel the effects of osteoarthritis, a disease caused by wear and tear of cartilage in the joints. Fortunately, you don't have to (and shouldn't) take this reality of aging lying down. Unlike its stubborn cousin rheumatoid arthritis, taking preventative steps now can minimize or delay the onset of osteoarthritis—helping to ensure that your joints continue to "jump for joy" during the years to come. Below are a few tips that may help.



Lighten the load. Maintaining a healthy body weight, the experts insist, is the single best way to prevent osteoarthritis and minimize its impact. Carrying extra body weight can really take its toll on your joints, especially the knees and hips. But don't despair if you're a long way from your ideal Body Mass Index (BMI): studies show that losing as little as 10 pounds can halve your risk of developing osteoarthritis in the knee.

Get physical. Exercise not only keeps your waistline trim, it also keeps your joints active and helps them absorb necessary nutrients. Cross-training, or alternating between different physical activities, is a great way to avoid workout weariness, prevent injuries due to repetitive motion, and exercise a range of joints and muscle groups.

You don't have to be an Olympian to do it. A weekly schedule of activity could involve swimming (one of the gentlest forms of exercise on the joints), walking, yoga, a bike ride, a hike, or some resistance training using light weights or an exercise band. And remember: Rome wasn't built in a day, so if you're out of shape avoid injuries by starting slowly and gradually building your fitness level up. Consult a doctor when beginning any exercise program, especially if you're trying to limit the effects of an existing osteoarthritis condition.

Nourish your body. It shouldn't come as a shock that a healthy body, starts with a healthy diet. While the links between nutrition and osteoarthritis are intricate, studies suggest that Vitamin D can help keep your joints in good working condition. Solid sources of Vitamin D are found in seafood including oysters, tuna, salmon, herring, sardines and mackerel. If fish isn't your favourite fare, you'll be happy to learn that milk and other dairy products including yogurt and cheese are usually fortified with Vitamin D.

While some people find that certain foods "trigger" joint flare ups, this varies depending on the individual. If you think a food allergy may be contributing to your condition, employ a process of elimination to reveal the offending food.

Play (or work) safe. While getting fit can be good for preventing or reducing the aches and pains of osteoarthritis, be sure to exercise caution as well. Support your workout regime with the proper equipment, especially good footwear. Stretch beforehand and consult an expert if you need help with proper form.

If your job involves repetitive physical labour, be sure to give yourself a periodic break (e.g., stand up, stretch out and walk around) and always use ergonomically designed tools and supports where possible (including items such as knee pads and wrist pads) to minimize wear and tear on joints. And remember to follow RICE—rest, ice, compression and elevation—if a joint is inflamed or injured, and take a trip to the doctor to ensure the damage isn't serious.

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