

# Healthy Transitions

SUMMER 2006 A HEALTHCARE RESOURCE FOR OUR FRIENDS WHO ARE 55-PLUS



## Osteoarthritis Treatments Reduce Pain, Help Maintain Movement

**F**ive years ago, Chicago resident Faye Wrubel began noticing pain in her knees. Over time, the pain increased until she could barely walk. My whole life changed completely. Normally I would walk at lunch, but if I were to go two or three blocks, the rest of the afternoon would be ruined because of the pain, says the 57-year-old art conservator.

Ms. Wrubel eventually learned from her orthopaedist that her pain was caused by osteoarthritis in her knees. Osteoarthritis, which results from the breakdown of cartilage in joints, is the most common form of arthritis. It is sometimes referred to as degenerative joint disease or wear-and-tear arthritis because it usually develops as people age, although it also can result from repeated trauma to a joint. It is most common in the neck, lower back, hips, knees and finger joints.

Symptoms of osteoarthritis include swelling, stiffness, pain and occasionally a grinding sensation in a joint during or after use. This type of arthritis usually is diagnosed through a physical exam and X-ray.

Certain treatments can reduce pain and swelling and help maintain joint movement. Treatment typically starts with the least invasive measures, such as anti-inflammatory

medications and physical therapy and then may progress to injections, such as cortisone, into the affected joint or surgery, says Walter G. Barr, MD, rheumatologist on the medical staff at Northwestern Memorial Hospital and professor of Medicine at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine. Dr. Barr notes that weight loss also has been shown to help prevent osteoarthritis and to reduce symptoms for those who already have the condition.

When Ms. Wrubel sought help for osteoarthritis, she was treated with several remedies, even surgery, but none provided relief. She then was referred to Dr. Barr, who administered a series of hyaluronic acid injections in each knee.

Hyaluronic acid, a component of joint fluid, acts as a lubricant that allows joints to move more smoothly. While these injections may have dramatic results for some patients, the effect lasts about six months to a year or more.

However, treatment can be repeated, considerably delaying the need for more invasive procedures, such as knee replacement surgery. Following the injections, Ms. Wrubel was pain-free for the first time since she developed osteoarthritis symptoms.



Since receiving osteoarthritis treatment, Faye Wrubel says she is able to walk with less pain.

Other treatments also are available. Steven Kodros, MD, orthopaedic surgeon on the medical staff at Northwestern Memorial and assistant professor of Clinical Orthopaedic Surgery at the Feinberg School, says surgeons try to use the least invasive techniques first before proceeding to joint replacement.

One such treatment is osteotomy, in which a surgeon reshapes the bones near the painful joint to redistribute the load on the joint. For osteoarthritis in the ankle, a surgeon can fuse the ankle bones


together in such a way that the patient can continue to walk and be active, but without pain.

Joint replacement, which is considered major surgery, may be required in more advanced cases of osteoarthritis.

Over the past 10 years, improvements have been made in prosthetic joints and post-operative pain management, giving them better durability and making rehabilitation much easier for patients, says Andrew Bunta, MD, associate chair, Clinical Affairs of Orthopaedic Surgery at Northwestern Memorial and vice chair and associate professor of Orthopaedic Surgery at the Feinberg School.

Dr. Bunta cautions that even with new techniques in pain management and materials, patient recovery is largely dependent on participation in physical therapy.

Ms. Wrubel is pleased with the osteoarthritis treatment she has received because now she can move with less pain. I only realized after the injections just how much pain I had been in before, she says.

For more information, call Northwestern Memorial Hospital's Health Resources and Physician Referral Service at 312-926-8400. 

## Good Nutrition and Regular Exercise Improve Health

**H**aving more energy, better mental health, a stronger immune system and improved mobility can be helped by eating right and exercising regularly.

While important at any age, keeping fit and trim is particularly important as people age and become at greater risk

for disease and injury, says Karin Ulstrup, MD, a physician on the medical staff at

Northwestern Memorial Hospital and instructor of Clinical Medicine at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine.

Changing lifestyle habits can be a daunting prospect, especially for those managing a chronic disorder such as high blood pressure, diabetes or obesity.

However, proper nutrition and routine workouts

can help prevent or reduce the harmful effects of chronic disorders.

It is a good idea to substitute unhealthy trans and saturated fats with healthier fats like Omega-3 fatty acids. Flaxseed and certain fatty fish are good sources of Omega-3s.

Omega-3s have been shown to help reduce cholesterol, and reducing cholesterol can help control blood pressure, as well as prevent heart attacks, strokes and heart failure, says Dr. Ulstrup.

Monounsaturated fats, which are found in canola oil, olive oil and many nuts, also are heart healthy. However, monounsaturated fat is still a fat cautions Deb Ognar, a registered dietitian at Northwestern Memorial's Wellness Institute. If it is used in moderation and in place of saturated fat, it is a great fat to add in. Because calorie needs decrease with age, controlling portion size and calorie intake are crucial to good health.


Dr. Ulstrup says the key to a successful exercise program is to start slowly, gradually increasing the number and length of workouts. She suggests that someone begin with two 10-minute sessions per week and then add five minutes to each workout, later increasing the number of sessions per week to five or six.

Weight training can help prevent diabetes and heart disease. Increasing muscle mass can lower blood sugar and the risk of diabetes and it can help tremendously with balance, stabilizing weaker bones, says Dr. Ulstrup.

### Benefits of Regular Exercise

- ▮ Increases strength, stamina and energy
- ▮ Benefits bones, digestion and appetite
- ▮ Improves control of blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar
- ▮ Improves balance and sleep

Before starting any exercise regimen, be sure to consult your primary care physician.

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### Four Strategies to Eating Healthy

1. Eat a varied diet to get all essential nutrients.
2. Visualize your dinner plate divided into quarters, with one reserved for protein, one for grains or starch and two for vegetables.
3. Add color to your meals by increasing fruits and vegetables; avoid an all-white or all-beige diet.
4. Drink water—at least eight glasses daily.

See the Calendar of Events on the back of this page.

