



Making *Life Easier*SM

Living with Arthritis

Imagine experiencing pain every time you stand, sit, turn your head, or use your hands. For people with arthritis, everyday activities, such as getting dressed and going up and down stairs become challenging and painful.

Approximately 50% of people age 65 and older have arthritis, a condition characterized by inflammation in and around the joints. In addition to persistent pain, arthritis can cause stiffness, making certain aspects of independent living difficult, and may even lead to depression. The following are some of the more commonly known types of arthritis:

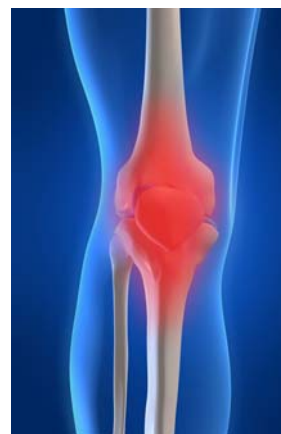
- **Fibromyalgia** – Characterized by muscle pain, fatigue, numbness or tingling in the feet and hands, severe headaches and even memory problems. Fibromyalgia is more likely to affect woman than men (7 to 1 ratio).
- **Gout** – Known for joints that are red and swollen, people with Gout often experience severe pain. Gout can be persistent, flare up for periods of time or be chronic.
- **Osteoarthritis** – The most common type of arthritis, osteoarthritis reflects a reduction of cartilage and bone causing painful movement affecting the knees, hands, hips and spine.
- **Rheumatoid Arthritis** – Characterized by deformity of the hands, pain, swelling and redness of the areas around the affected joints, rheumatoid arthritis is an inflammatory (autoimmune) disease affecting the lining the joints. Women are twice as likely as men to have this condition.

In addition to affecting strength and flexibility, arthritis also limits both manual and joint dexterity. As a result, people with arthritis often find it challenging to perform day-to-day activities associated with independent living. For example, someone with arthritis in the hip is likely experience discomfort when sitting up in bed, twisting and turning to get in or out of a vehicle, and even while resting. If arthritis affects someone's wrists and joints in the hands, everything from turning on the shower and holding a bar of soap, to drying off with a towel and getting dressed can be difficult and painful.

Often people don't realize that most everything we do on a daily basis involves our joints. Everything from holding a phone, squeezing a toothpaste tube, brushing teeth, holding a utensil or pen, lifting a bag of groceries, making a meal, opening a pill bottle, driving a car, and more can be challenging.

Did You Know?

50 million Americans have been diagnosed with arthritis, making it the No. 1 cause of disability for people of all ages.



“To help our [caregivers](#) walk a mile in another’s shoes and learn how our clients with arthritis may find everyday activities to be challenging, we suggest activity simulation to bring things to life,” said Mary Doepke, RN, Owner of Home Helpers of Hinsdale. For example, pinch your fingers together and wrap a thick rubber band around them. Then try to go about your day. You will quickly realize all the activities that require strength and dexterity – performing tasks with arthritic fingers/hands is both challenging and frustrating.”

Awareness is often an important first step in understanding the limitations a person may be experiencing due to an illness or disease. This simple experiment can help you gain perspective, but remember to approach the subject with sensitivity. Just because a person finds activities challenging, be sure to ask how you can help instead of just jumping in and taking over. Many older people indicate it can be quite demoralizing when this happens. The following are a few other tips you might find helpful:

- **Adaptive aids** – Consider purchasing gadgets and products with larger handles that may be easier for a person to grasp and use. Also, smaller size containers can be easier to manage such as a pint of milk instead of a one-gallon jug.
- **Modify activities** – Instead of lifting or carrying items that are heavy or difficult to manage, consider using a cart with wheels to bring groceries in the house and take laundry from one room to another.
- **Caregivers** – Enlist the services of a professional caregiver from a home care agency, such as [Home Helpers](#), to assist with daily activities, such as light housekeeping, meal preparation, grocery shopping, bathing and dressing.
- **Learn more** – Read about others’ experiences with arthritis. [Katie Stewart](#) and [Kimberly Edwards](#) both blog about living with the condition.
- The following websites also offer helpful information:
 - Arthritis Foundation – www.arthritis.org
 - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – www.cdc.gov/arthritis
 - Medline Plus – www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/arthritis.html
 - Mayo Clinic – www.mayoclinic.com/health/arthritis/DS01122

HOME HELPERS – *Making Life Easier* Home Helpers offers quality non-medical and personal care* and companionship services similar to the care and support often provided by family members. Our flexible care plans are tailored to fit our clients’ specific needs and budgets. Compassionate Care is a bi-monthly newsletter produced by Home Helpers. We hope you found this edition to be informative and helpful.

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*Personal care provided as permitted by state law. Each office is independently owned and operated. Services may vary at each individual office location. Check with your local Home Helpers office for available services. Home Helpers does not discriminate against anyone on the basis of religion, race, sex, color, national origin, ethnicity, disability, age or sexual preference in connection with employment or acceptance, treatment, or participation in its programs, services and activities.