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Daily Physical Activity Helps Lessen the Severity of Arthritis

More than 46 million people of all ages in the U.S. have arthritis. A recent study from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that arthritis is the nation's most common disability.

The same CDC study showed that the number of people who report arthritis as their primary cause of disability has grown by more than 3 million since 1999. What's more alarming - with the aging of baby boomers, the prevalence of arthritis is expected to increase 40 percent by the year 2030.

Given the pervasiveness of arthritis, many Americans understand that it is a serious health problem. However, some are unaware that physical activity can actually help lessen the severity of arthritis. In fact, increased daily movement or exercise is one of the best approaches to helping reduce stiff, achy joints caused by arthritis.

"Physical activity, including stretching and strengthening, is crucial to improving joint pain and mobility and reducing fatigue often associated with arthritis," says Dr. Patience White, chief public health officer for the Arthritis Foundation. "Moving just 30 minutes daily, even 10 to 15 minutes at a time, can reduce the impact of arthritis on a person's daily activities and help to prevent developing more painful arthritis."

The Arthritis Foundation has created a program, Let's Move Together, which is designed to inspire people to move every day to prevent or treat arthritis. Its Web site offers helpful tips for increasing movement, including:

- **Take a hike.** Walking is one of the easiest, safest and most beneficial forms of exercise. It helps keep your weight in check and strengthens muscles, which reduces pressure on the knees and decreases pain. Walking just fast enough so that you're slightly short of breath is a good pace. The goal is to strengthen the muscles in your legs and around your knees and hips.
- **Go for a spin.** Stationary cycling strengthens your heart, hips and knees -- with less impact on joints than other forms of cardiovascular exercise, such as running. For those new to stationary cycling, start slowly with a five-minute session at a comfortable pace three times per day.
- **Make a splash.** Using a combination of soothing warm water and gentle movements helps increase joint flexibility and range of motion. Studies have shown aquatic-based exercise helps to restore and maintain muscle strength, relieve pain and stiffness and provide a community support system for people with arthritis. Those looking to get started can explore the Arthritis Foundation Aquatic Program, which is offered in most major cities.
- **Go with the flow.** Tai chi is a noncompetitive, self-paced system of gentle physical exercise and stretching. Participants in a tai chi program follow a series of postures or movements in a slow, graceful manner. Each posture flows into the next without pausing. Experts agree that tai chi may improve mobility, breathing and relaxation. Plus, the movements don't require deep bending or squatting, which makes it easier and more comfortable to learn.

"Without regular exercise, muscles become smaller and weaker, and weakness and weight gain from inactivity puts stress on weight-bearing joints such as the hips, knees and ankles," says White. "Aerobic walking and other exercise programs can make a significant impact on thwarting arthritis while also improving a person's overall well-being."

More information on the benefits of daily movement can be found online at www.letsmovetogether.org.

Courtesy of ARAcontent

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