

Top 10 Most Burning Questions and Answers for Arthritis

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The Arthritis Specialists

1. Q: How long is this going to take to go away? Or how long before I see improvements?

A: It depends...it depends on YOU.

In general, it takes to 4 to 12 weeks to go through the first 2 phases of healing (no pain, all movement back to normal).

It may take another 1 to 4 months to get back to all your strength back, and another period of time to return to high level activities...depending on how active you are. These are the third and fourth phase of healing.

Here are 10 variables that determine how fast someone can heal:

- ✓ Overall health. Healthy fit people heal faster. Younger people heal faster.
- ✓ Other health issues such as diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, tobacco use, alcohol abuse and body weight all influence healing rates...and make the time to heal longer.
- ✓ Diet. People who consume more nutrients in their calories (Dr. Joel Fuhrman calls this "Nutrarian") heal faster than those who primarily eat processed foods. Those who eat an anti-inflammatory diet heal more quickly.
- ✓ Rest levels. Our bodies need sleep and rest to rebuild. A lack of sleep slows healing time. 8 hours of sleep a night improves the rate of healing.
- ✓ Stress levels. People who have high levels of stress heal more slowly.
- ✓ Sedentary lifestyle. People who sit all day for work or to watch TV heal more slowly.
- ✓ People who follow advice and instruction from top level healthcare professionals heal more quickly than those who do not follow-through with care.
- ✓ People who are highly aware of their daily postures and habits heal more quickly...because they can adjust habits such as sleep or sitting positions more quickly.
- ✓ Readers heal more quickly. People with higher attention spans are more likely to be self-educated on a topic and more likely to follow-through with successful treatment.
- ✓ People who think there's hope tend to be more persistent and won't let anything stop them.

Most people we see in the clinic feel better in 1 to 3 visits...or within 1 to 2 weeks. Laser treatments should show improvement after the first day. If you go longer than 2 weeks without feeling better or moving better...you may be doing either too much or too little. It is normal to get a little exacerbation of pain when doing a new activity, or after doing too much.

2. Q: Can I be completely healed or will this come back again?

A: Most people we see who complete the 4 Phases of Healing (meaning they no longer have pain, they have full mobility and strength, and they're back to doing all the activities they want to do without pain)...they have a minimal chance the pain will return. The arthritis may still be in the joint, but it will not cause pain.

The stronger the person is...the less likely the arthritis symptoms will come back.

Your body is a bit like a car. If you take care of it, regularly change the oil and keep it running and fine tuned...little chance of break down.

If you ignore it, or just alter the pain with medications...very likely to break down and be in need of repair. Cortisone injections are shown to actually make the arthritis worse over time.

3. Q: Do I need any special equipment?

A: At Excel PT, we use a minimalist approach...We don't use big, fancy, expensive equipment...

There are some exceptions, including laser and aquatic therapy. Otherwise, most exercises can be done with a simple ball, exercise bands and a safe place to exercise.

Our model focuses on world-class hands-on Physical Therapist, a pool, a table and some basic exercise equipment you can do at home or on the road if traveling. This works best for most people.

4. Q: Should I use heat or ice on my leg?

A: The cause of most arthritis pain is inflammation in the joints...not the damage in the joint itself! Ice may help to reduce the inflammation, and heat may make it worse, however sometimes heat or a Jacuzzi can loosen the muscles around the joint. Each patient is different.

Consider that arthritis is "inflammation" on the joint. Sometimes heat can increase that inflammation.

So if you're inflamed...do you want to put heat on it and make it more inflamed? Or ice to calm the inflammation down.

We have seen some people use ice on the joints to calm down the inflammation temporarily, but some people with severe hypomobility do well with heat.

5. Q: Which exercises should I do?

A: The best exercises for you depend on the cause of your arthritis.

We will cover the 3 most common causes...

- Hypomobility - not enough movement in the joints and surrounding muscles. This may also include obesity.
- Hypermobility - too much movement in the joints and very weak surrounding muscles.
- Previous injuries that have not gone through the 4 phases of healing

Each has a series of gradually more advanced exercises. So the key to picking the right exercise is to find the cause of your arthritis.

6. Q: How often should I do the exercises? And do I need to do them forever?

A: Most people we work with in the clinic for arthritis do the exercises at least once per day...every day. Some will do them up to 3 times per day.

Doing the same exact exercises for years without changing could be a mistake. In general, to get stronger, your exercise should progress and get more difficult as your strength improves.

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With training your body adapts and gets stronger. Keeping that in mind, there are 2 rules to training:

1. Everything works.
2. Nothing works forever.

This means that any exercise (although difficult) MAY make you stronger. But once your body is no longer challenged, it's time to move on to something different or more challenging.

One of the best things you should incorporate into your program during the Phases of Healing for your arthritis is a consistent walking, aquatic or stationary bike program.

Aside from your strengthening program, people who do light aerobic exercise several days per week have less risk of reinjuring their arthritis.

7. Q: What do I need to do for complete care? Am I going to relapse?

A: The best thing to do for arthritis, if you are worried about it coming back again in the future, is to complete all 4 phases of healing.

Phase One is where you focus on getting rid of the pain, numbness and tingling.

Phase Two is where you focus on getting normal movement back.

Phase Three is where you focus on getting full strength.

Phase Four is where you go back to previous activities you want to do.

Just because the pain is gone, that doesn't mean that you are fully healed. In our clinic, when we see a person who had arthritis...and they are now pain free and have full motion and on their way to attaining full strength, we ask:

"What activities have you avoided in the past month that you want to get back to doing?" Some will say walking, or golfing or gardening...something along those lines.

And we'll tell that person to take the next month or two and start to incorporate everything you want to do that you could not do before. Most times we guide them as to which activities they should incorporate first. When they have fully attained their previous strength, they should have all previous activities incorporated into their routine. They keep doing their exercises at home to get stronger and stronger.

Most come back for a recheck appointment in 2 months and have no trouble at all. At that time we can help them progress their exercises to a more challenging program if they need it.

Some do have a relapse.

We then take a look at the activity and at the program and help them get on the right track. As mentioned before, people who are stronger recover more quickly...People who make good choices in their activities heal more quickly.

So it's usually only one or two visits before that person is on the right track again.

8. Q: How do I know the cause of my pain?

A: There are 3 common causes of pain...and here are some general guidelines for each.

Hypomobility or not enough mobility causes compression in the joint cartilage, and when it is compressed, it does not get nutrition. Hypomobility can be caused by a sedentary life style, or by being overweight.

Hypermobility or too much mobility causes the joint to form bone spurs, and can cause the surface of the cartilage to shear off abnormally. It can also cause pain because the joint moves too far and dislocates (also called instability).

Previous unhealed injuries need to be addressed individually.

9. Q: Why does my joint stiffen up?

There are several reasons why the joint may stiffen up, but usually it can be traced back to a gradual weakening of the surrounding muscles. Maintain and gaining strength are key to staying pain free. Remember:

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10. Q: What about joint replacements? Won't that solve my problems?

Joint replacements may be an option that help to reduce your pain, however remember that if you have a stiff or loose joint before the surgery, you will probably have one after. Many people come out of surgery expecting to be pain free, but they are not because they did not change the mechanical cause of their pain (hypomobility/hypermobility).

Also, if you are weak, many times a joint replacement can make that weakness worse, and this can lead to problems in other parts of the body.

Joint replacement drastically changes the body permanently. If the surgery fails...and they do fail, the only choice is to have another joint replacement, or to have the joint fused solid. Neither option is a good one, and comes with many side effects.

So we say, it is best to prevent rather than replace.