

“Rambling on with Kathleen”

Arthritis

The word arthritis is used by many people to describe aches and pains in or around the bones or joints. However, the term actually refers to more than 100 different diseases. Although very different, the similarity of these “arthritis” diseases is that all affect the musculoskeletal system and the joints.

Arthritis can limit even the simplest of activities such as walking and bathing. It can affect anyone at any age, including children and it affects more women than men.

According to the Arthritis Foundation, 46 million people were thought to have arthritis in 2006. This reveals an increase from 35 million in 1985.

Some people are more at risk to develop arthritis. However, the causes of some forms of arthritis are not yet fully understood. Because there are also different types of arthritis, and each person is affected differently, people may experience the symptoms differently. A person with arthritis may experience pain, swelling, loss of movement and sometimes the arthritis may even affect other parts of the body.

Although many people believe there is no help for arthritis sufferers, there are in fact medications, surgeries and other alternative methods to help treat the symptoms. Even dietary changes can benefit someone that has an arthritis such as Gout. Living in a warmer and dryer climate will also help to alleviate some of the symptoms but it does not “cure” the disease.

Because people react to a disease differently, the treatments will differ. Although in some cases there is no cure, the emphasis is usually on pain relief and improving functions of the joints to manage the arthritis. Something can always be done to improve the life and situation for a person with arthritis and the patient can work with the health care team to find the best approach for them.

Types of arthritis may include:

- Osteoarthritis: Common form, the cartilage that covers the joint deteriorates causing pain and loss of movement as the bones then rub together which can cause pain.
- Rheumatoid Arthritis: Autoimmune disease – joint lining becomes inflamed and it affects the body’s immune system activity
- Gout: Affects mostly men and is usually the result of a problem in the body’s chemistry. Attacks the small joint and mostly the big toe.
- Ankylosing Spondylitis – Affects the spine, Inflammation of the bones causes the spine to grow together.
- Systemic Lupus Erythematosus (lupus) – a more serious disorder that can inflame and damage joints and other connective tissue in the body.
- Scleroderma – A disease that affects the connective tissue in the body which causes thickening and hardening of the skin.
- Fibromyalgia – Pain throughout the body that affects muscles and attachments.

Other types of “arthritis” include but are not limited to:

Carpel Tunnel Syndrome
Cogan’s Syndrome
Degenerative Joint Disease
Lyme Disease
Kawasaki Disease
Septic Arthritis
Rotator Cuff Tendinitis
Fifth’s Disease
Osteomyelitis
Osteoporosis
Viral Arthritis
Traumatic Arthritis
Tennis Elbow
Trochanteric Bursitis

The list goes on and on! As you can see, it is not just another name for aches and pains. In fact, it is thought to be the most common health condition in our population and even more common as we age. The symptoms, severity and treatments will depend on the exact diagnosis and how the person is affected.

For more information on this topic please contact your physician or health care practitioner. Other resources and resources used for this article are:

Arthritis Foundation: www.arthritis.org

John Hopkins Arthritis Center: www.Hopkins-arthritis.org

National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases: <http://www.nih.gov/niams/>

Other Internet Sites

Local Physicians Office

Pharmaceutical Companies

Wellness Webpage by Kathleen Dunkelberger Nursing Consulting Services, LLC

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