

Osteoarthritis: Natural and Alternative Treatments



The treatment for osteoarthritis includes lifestyle changes like weight loss and exercise. Medicines and surgery may also be part of the treatment. There are also many natural and alternative treatments that may help ease pain and stiffness.

Heat and cold

Using heat and cold treatments are simple ways to reduce your symptoms:

- Heat soothes stiff joints and tired muscles. Heat works well before exercise, for example. Heat treatments include:
 - A warm shower or bath, or soak (for example, fill the sink with warm water and move your fingers, hands, and wrists around in the water)
 - A moist heating pad
 - A warm, moist wash cloth
 - An electric blanket or throw
- Cold treatments help to numb painful areas and decrease swelling. They include the following wrapped in a thin towel:
 - An ice pack. To make an ice pack, put ice cubes in a plastic bag that seals at the top.
 - A gel-filled cold pack

Be careful when using heat or cold. Make sure you wrap the pack in a thin towel, so you don't injure your skin. Each treatment should last for only 10 to 20 minutes. Do not use ice or heat if you have diabetes, problems with your circulation, or any other medical conditions without checking with your healthcare provider first. Your healthcare provider or therapist can give you specific instructions.

Meditation and relaxation

Meditation and relaxation can help you deal with arthritis pain. Pain relievers, anti-inflammatory drugs, and injections of corticosteroids or hyaluronic acid can provide relief. There are many different methods, such as deep breathing exercises, meditation, and yoga. Look for information and programs online or in your community. Or try this simple deep breathing method sometimes called belly breathing:

1. Sit in a comfortable chair or lie on your back.
2. Put one hand on your chest and the other hand on your stomach.
3. Take a breath in through your nose. The hand on your stomach should rise. The hand on your chest should move very little.
4. Breathe out through your mouth, pushing out as much air as you can. The hand on your stomach should move in as you breathe out, but the hand on your chest should move very little. You should feel the muscles of your stomach tighten.
5. Continue to breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. You should feel your stomach rise and fall. Count slowly each time you breathe out.

Acupuncture

Acupuncture is a 2,000-year-old practice. Providers put thin needles in certain parts of the body. Research shows that it can help to ease the pain of arthritis.

For more information or to find a provider near you, visit the [American Academy of Medical Acupuncture's website, www.americanacupuncture.org/](http://www.americanacupuncture.org/).

Massage



Therapeutic massage has many benefits. It may:

- Help you and your muscles relax
- Improve blood flow to muscles and joints
- Help joints stay more flexible

Look for a certified massage therapist. Many are trained to treat sore muscles, joint pain, and stiffness.

Vitamins, supplements, and herbs

People with arthritis, or other long-term conditions that cause pain, often look for alternative ways to reduce pain. Vitamins, supplements, and herbs may or may not help you to feel better. Before you try any vitamin, supplement, or herb, make sure you ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist. This is very important if you are taking prescription medicines.

Physical therapy and occupational therapy

A physical or occupational therapist can help if you are having problems with daily activities. A physical therapist can put together an exercise routine to build muscle and improve heart health. An occupational

therapist can make your everyday tasks easier by suggesting alternate ways to do them. They may even suggest splints, supports, or assistive devices to ease pain and make your life easier.

Weight management

Studies have shown that weight loss in overweight people can improve arthritis symptoms. Talk with your healthcare provider about your most desirable weight. They can advise ways to lose weight, if needed.

Psychological treatments

Research shows that many psychological therapies, or those that deal with thinking and emotions, help people cope with arthritis pain. Therapies include:

- Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)
- Pain coping skills training
- Biofeedback
- Stress management
- Hypnosis

Ask your healthcare provider for more information about these therapies.

Or visit the [National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine's website, www.nccih.nih.gov/](http://www.nccih.nih.gov/).

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