

Arthritis: 5 Myths Exploded

Which disease has been well documented for centuries, yet remains shrouded in mystery? The answer is a condition so common, it may surprise you.

Even with more than 100 common forms, arthritis is still widely misunderstood. Doctors and researchers continue to study the causes of arthritis, and diligently work on new therapies and treatments. Until a cure is found, it's important for the general public, and arthritis patients in particular, to be able to separate the myths from the facts.

Myth #1: Arthritis is an older person's condition.

Fact: This is the single largest misconception about this cruel disease. While arthritis commonly affects older individuals, it can cause crippling pain at any age. Roughly half of all people afflicted with some form of arthritis are under the age of 65. Rheumatoid arthritis can strike people at a young age, and juvenile arthritis can affect kids as young as toddlers. The number of younger people being diagnosed with some form of arthritis is growing, particularly with the baby boomer generation gradually entering retirement age. The stereotype of the elderly person with arthritis no longer persists. Today's arthritis patients are younger, more active and enjoying productive lifestyles.

Myth #2: Those who develop arthritis face a lifetime of stiff joints.

Fact: While stiff joints are a hallmark of many forms of arthritis, it's no longer necessary for every patient to endure days and nights of pain and discomfort. Drug therapies can do wonders in controlling stiffness and pain. There are also various drug-free therapies that can be quite effective, including occupational and physical therapy. Patients who have made positive lifestyle management changes, such as weight management and a maintaining a healthy diet, enjoy relief from some of the primary symptoms of this condition.

Myth #3: If your joints feel stiff, you must have arthritis.

Fact: Again, one of the most common symptoms of arthritis is the presence of stiff joints. The stiffness felt by people who suffer from a number of conditions, including arthritis, is usually the result of underlying inflammation. Therefore, stiff joints don't necessarily indicate arthritis, but can also be the result of an injury, or can indicate the presence of illness.

Myth #4: If one or both parents suffered from rheumatoid arthritis, you will eventually develop the condition.

Fact: There is not enough sufficient medical evidence to prove that rheumatoid arthritis is an inherited condition. It's true that some people may be genetically predisposed toward the disease, but heredity alone is not a major risk factor. Rheumatoid arthritis is neither a result of wear and tear on the joints, nor is it solely hereditary. It is an autoimmune disorder in which the body attacks its own tissues, eventually causing the symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis to develop.

Myth #5: People who suffer from arthritis should avoid physical activity.

Fact: If you have arthritis, exercise is one of the best therapies you can give to your body. Exercise is a proven way for the body to naturally slow the loss of muscle and bone density. Regular physical exercise strengthens the muscles, improves flexibility, and helps patients increase their overall range of motion. Don't put off exercise due to the fear of straining or hurting yourself.

Understanding the facts about arthritis begins with dispelling the myths. If you or someone you care about has arthritis, learn all that you can about the disease. You'll be better prepared to live comfortably with the disease, rather than simply living in spite of it.