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Stay Ahead of Arthritis

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By Cary Barbor


We tend to go to great lengths to avoid pain. So when we see the inflamed joints that people with [arthritis](#) have and how difficult it is for them to move, we think to ourselves, "How can I sidestep that?"

AOL Health spoke with Dr. Dale Snead, an orthopedic surgeon at Methodist Sports Medicine in

Indianapolis, to get his expert advice on avoiding [arthritis](#).

There are a few ways you can help yourself avoid the joint pain that comes with [osteoarthritis](#), says Snead.

"Maintaining motion is the main thing," he says.

In other words, keep [exercising](#) . Or if you aren't, start. Don't be fooled into thinking you can "preserve" your joints by not using them. This is a situation where the phrase "use it or lose it" is apt. When your joints are functioning well, they're more likely to keep functioning. And once they lose that functionality, it's very hard to get it back.

By the same token, though, some people are less tolerant of high-impact activities than others. If an activity like [running](#) is causing you pain, you may be better off switching to something lower impact such as biking or [walking](#). Swimming is also a terrific option. Dr. William Leone, an orthopedic surgeon at Holy Cross Hospital in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., believes that a swimming pool can be key to good joint health. By swimming laps or performing exercises in a pool, you can maintain good joint function without putting undue pressure on the joints.

And, says Snead, it's best not to stick with the same exercise every day but rather to cross-train.

"You want to use your joints' full range of motion," he says, "so participate in all different sorts of activities" – cardio, [stretching](#), [yoga](#) – whatever keeps things moving.


[Strengthening the muscles](#) that surround the joints is another key element to avoiding [arthritis](#) pain.

"Stronger muscles improve how the joint moves," says Leone.

So having strong quadriceps and hamstrings, for example, will help keep your knee on track, which will relieve painful pressure on the joint.

Arthritis frequently crops up in a joint that was traumatically injured, though the injury may have been many years earlier. So do what you can to avoid traumatic injury in the joint by wearing protective equipment when playing sports and generally being careful when you're young. Your body will thank you later.

And if you have a very strenuous job where you are constantly taxing your joints – delivering heavy boxes, for example – you may be contributing to the development of the condition. After all, says Snead, "joints are mechanical. They wear out." So if you're coming up against pain, get it checked by a doctor, but you may want to shift your daily duties. The key is to keep the body moving but not to strain it beyond what it can handle.

Snead doesn't recommend any particular food to stave off [arthritis](#) but says you do need to [eat healthy](#). Follow general guidelines of plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains and reasonable portions. Besides being nutritious, this type of eating will help keep off excess weight. And being [obese](#) or overweight can exacerbate [arthritis pain](#)  and damage to the joint tremendously.

In the end, though, Snead says that genetics are what determine when and if you'll develop arthritis, and, of course, there is nothing we can do about those. So your best bet is to do what you can do to avoid the pain by keeping yourself and your joints in good shape throughout your lifetime.

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