

A photograph of a person's legs and hands. The person is wearing blue jeans and a green shirt. They are holding their right knee with their right hand, suggesting pain or discomfort. The background is a blurred indoor setting with a blue couch and a wooden table.

# Self help for Arthritis

From Mr Geza Kordas MD PhD FRCS Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeon

# How can you self-manage your osteo-arthritis?

- Disclaimer: the information in this booklet contains general advice for patients waiting for hip and knee replacement surgery or who are suffering from arthritis and have not yet seen a consultant orthopaedic surgeon. It does not replace the consultation with a health care professional. You should consider speaking with your GP:
  - If you have not been formally diagnosed with arthritis as other conditions may cause similar symptoms
  - If your symptoms worsen significantly over a short period of time
  - If you feel you cannot cope without strong painkillers
  - Do speak with your GP if you are concerned that you need urgent treatment!

# The symptoms of arthritis

- Pain in the affected joint which is worse during/ after standing or walking
- Pain at night
- Stiffness in the affected joint
- Swelling which subsides after rest
- Warmth of the affected joint
- Grinding noise from the joint



# What can I do to help my symptoms?

- Activity modification
- Exercise
- Eat well
- Sleep well
- Weight control
- Heat packs
- Pain medication
- Complementary medicine
- Supports and aids
- Stay positive



# Activity modification

If you have arthritis in your hip or knee you can reduce the pain by doing things differently

- Consider cycling instead of walking
- Avoid impact activity and favour non-impact activities such swimming and cycling
- Think strategically about how you move around the house especially climbing stairs
- Try to sit down for activities which you did while standing previously, such as working in the kitchen



# Exercise

Exercise helps you stay mobile, strengthens your muscles, keeps your weight in check and improves your mental health too!

- Exercise a bit a few times a day
- Just do enough to keep the joint moving if you have a lot of pain
- Do not provoke sharp pain
- Exercise so that it doesn't upset your arthritic joint
- Non-impact exercise like cycling is better than high impact activities such as running



# Eat well

Healthy eating can improve your joint symptoms and help to maintain a healthy weight

- Eat plenty of fruit and veg
- Use healthy oils found in, avocados, nuts and seeds
- Turmeric is a natural anti-inflammatory
- Whole grain is better than white bread
- Stick with lean meat if you are not vegetarian/vegan



# Sleep well

A good night's sleep goes a long way ensuring you feel as well as possible

- Maintain a routine going to bed at the same time every night
- Switch off electronics at least half an hour before bedtime
- Use a pillow between your knees when lying on your side to get comfortable
- Take some painkillers and/or anti-inflammatory with your last meal



# Weight control

Maintaining a healthy weight helps reduce the stress in the arthritic joint

- Exercise if you can to burn fat
- Maintain a balanced diet
- Reduce the calories if you are overweight
- Fasting not only helps losing weight but has other far reaching health benefits including boosting your immune system and slowing down ageing!



# Heat packs

Warmth can help ease your pain unless the joint is acutely inflamed such as after an injury

- Warm packs increase the blood flow helping ease the pain
- Some people find cold packs more useful so do experiment



# Pain medication

Unfortunately, if you are waiting for joint replacement it is inevitable that you will need medication to keep on top of your joint pain until your surgery

- Take the minimum effective amount
- Use medication as and when needed, not continuously
- If you are planning to go for a walk or exercise, take some before and after
- Consider taking medication before you go to bed to help you sleep



# Painkillers

These predominantly act to suppress the pain, but do not treat the cause of it

- Start with simple ones such as Paracetamol
- The next level is Codein/Tramadol
- Note that Co-Codamol contains Paracetamol too!
- Next comes Oramorph
- Then opioid patches
- Apart from Paracetamol all others need to be prescribed by a doctor
- Opioids used long term can have serious side effects and are not better than simple analgesia combined with anti-inflammatories



# Anti-inflammatories

These suppress inflammation which is the cause of the pain. There are a lot of types, if one does not work for you keep trying a different one

- Some of these are available over the counter such as Ibuprofen. The strength is half of the prescription one though
- You cannot take these if:
  - you are on Warfarin
  - you are asthmatic
- If it causes you heartburn, stop immediately
- Anti-inflammatory gels do not penetrate deep enough to reach the hip or knee joint, but some people with skinny legs find them helpful on the knee



# Complementary medicine

There is patchy evidence that some of these work to reduce symptoms but at least they are not harmful. They will definitely not cure arthritis.

- Turmeric is a natural anti-inflammatory
- Massage can help pain from tight muscles
- Some people claim supplements like glucose-amines and chondroitin sulphate are helpful, but there is little scientific evidence to support this



# Supports and aids

There is no shame in using walking aids if they help you to mobilise. Hopefully, you will not need them after your joint replacement surgery!

- Sticks can help offload the painful joint
- Crutches are helpful if you cannot rely on your hand and wrist
- Frames with or without wheels can do the same and are useful if you have a balance problem
- A soft healed shoe or a gel insole helps soften the impact when the heel strikes the ground
- Braces can help support the knee and are especially useful if your knee is unstable



# Stay positive

It is difficult if you live in pain and cannot do the things you love but try to concentrate on the positives

- Our mood has a huge influence on how much pain we feel
- Try to stay as active as you can
- Concentrate on the things you **can** do and not on the things you can't
- Take active decisions and do not let the pain control your life
- Try mindfulness meditation
- Plan something for after your successful joint replacement



# Tell us what you think!

- We welcome both NHS and private patients. The waiting lists for joint replacements in NHS hospitals has swollen to levels unseen in the last 15 years. If you have insurance or wish to pay for your treatment let us know so we can expedite your surgery.
- You can have your hip or partial knee replacement as a day case procedure with us. This approach helps you get back on your feet sooner and reduces hospital related complications.
- We offer telephone and video consultations as routine for follow-up appointments to avoid unnecessary travel.

