

CareAccess Newsletter

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What you should know about Arthritis

Arthritis is the most common chronic condition in the United States; affecting almost 46 million people, which is 21 percent of all American adults. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention project this number will rise to 67 million by 2030. Although arthritis is associated with older adults, it can affect people of all ages and is more common among women. In a 2008 study, the National Arthritis Data Workgroup reported that over a three month period, arthritis caused 59 million Americans to suffer from episodes of low back pain and another 30 million to suffer from episodes of neck pain. Arthritis pain can range from mild to severe and limit activity; in fact, it is the third leading cause of work limitation and the leading cause of disability.

The most common arthritis - Osteoarthritis

Osteoarthritis is the most common form of arthritis affecting about 33 million Americans. It is a degenerative disease that can develop at any age; however, it is linked with advancing age as it usually occurs among individuals older than 65 years. As we age, the cartilage between our bones begins wearing away causing the bones to rub against each other which results in pain and swelling. It also causes the ligaments that hold the bones together to weaken and thicken. As a result, bone

spurs develop around the joints and can press on the surrounding nerve tissue and cause pain.

Cause - Genetics is a risk factor as osteoarthritis tends to run in families. Being overweight or obese increases the risk because of the added strain on the joints. Lastly, a history of traumatic joint injuries such as bone fractures raises the risk due to damage caused to the joints and cartilage.

Symptoms - Symptoms include joint aches, burning or sharp pain. The pain may be consistent or fluctuate with conditions such as weather, inactivity or too much activity. Stiffness, muscle weakness and cracking/creaking are common symptoms as are joint issues such as swelling, deformity and reduced range of motion.

Prevention and Treatment - Prevention involves maintaining a healthy weight and exercising regularly. Protect your joints by resting them if they are sore and wearing protective gear such as

wrist pads and knee pads when appropriate. If you develop osteoarthritis, there are means of controlling it. Results from the Fitness Arthritis Seniors Trial (the largest exercise and osteoarthritis study) suggest that cardiovascular activity and strength training can significantly improve physical performance and reduce disability and pain. Cardiovascular exercise

reduces joint inflammation while strength training builds up muscles to provide better joint support and lessen the pain. Stretching is essential because it helps maintain the range of motion of joints and reduce stiffness.

Another Form of arthritis - Rheumatoid Arthritis

Over two million Americans struggle with rheumatoid arthritis (RA), a disabling autoimmune disease that causes chronic inflammation within the lining of the joints. RA can develop at any age; however, most cases are diagnosed between the ages of 30 and 55.

Cause - The cause of RA is not yet fully understood. Studies indicate

that cigarette smoking may be a risk factor for RA. RA is common in smaller joints such as fingers and wrists, but it can affect larger joints, like knees, hips and shoulders. The pain and stiffness also tend to be symmetrical, meaning that your right and left wrists will hurt.

Prevention and Treatment - Prevention for RA does not currently exist because the exact cause is still unknown. However, there are medical and lifestyle approaches that can relieve some of the pain. Exercise is recommended as it reduces pain, strengthens muscles and helps maintain functional ability. Your physician's clearance is required before beginning an exercise program. To maintain your range of motion, stretch daily. Experts recommend strength training two or three days per week. Nutrition is a crucial component of controlling RA. The Johns Hopkins Arthritis Center recommends eating a healthy diet filled with fruits, vegetables and whole grains while limiting sugar, fat and alcohol. If you smoke, consider quitting as it will reduce some symptoms. Studies suggest smoking worsens the joint swelling and pain associated with RA.

If you are concerned about arthritis, discuss any symptoms or concerns at your next visit with your Care Access Primary Care Physician.

For more information on arthritis, visit the American Arthritis Foundation at www.arthritis.org.

As your health plan, Care Access is dedicated to providing you with healthful information to help you live healthier and focus on prevention and wellness. At Care Access Health Plan we urge you see your primary care physician for regular check-ups and ask you to recognize and understand your lifestyle habits and identify your risk factors which will enable you to work with your PCP to help keep you active and healthy.

Important Reminders

Stay Healthy by Visiting Your Doctor Regularly

Care Access urges you to schedule an appointment with your Care Access Primary Care Physicians within the first 60-90 days of enrollment and then on a regular basis to stay healthy.

Tell Your Doctor About Your Allergies

It is important to remember to tell your physician if you have any allergies to ANYTHING, and ANY kind of reactions to any medications.

For Pharmacy Benefits You Need A Physician

If you have prescriptions written by physicians who are not in the Care Access Provider Directory your prescription may be denied. If you are a new Member, do not use old prescriptions written by a non-participating doctor, as your prescriptions may be denied.

Please remember if you have a pharmacy or a prescription problem, please call our Member Services line during business hours, from 9 am to 5 pm at 866-429-2882 or 305-614-5050, or CVS/Caremark (after hours) at 866-240-4912.

When Referrals Are Needed

Follow these steps to see a medical specialist:

- To see a medical specialist your primary care physician must issue an Authorization.
- Tell your physician to call Care Access for the required Authorization.
- After authorization you will be able to see a medical specialist
- If a problem occurs, call Member Services at 305-614-5050.