

Arthritis treatments: How to get pain relief from arthritis

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There are more than 100 types of arthritis and related conditions, and they affect at least 54 million adults and 300,000 children in the United States, according to the Arthritis Foundation.

Fortunately, there are also many medications, non-medication options, [lifestyle changes](#) and surgeries available to help you manage [arthritis pain](#) and other symptoms.

"We've really come a long way in the past decade in terms of helping our patients live relatively symptom-free lives," Scripps Clinic rheumatologist Dr. Kavitta Allem explained in an interview for San Diego Health.

Let's take a look at the most common [arthritis](#) treatments recommended by experts, whether they're for osteoarthritis, [rheumatoid arthritis](#) or [psoriatic arthritis](#).

Arthritis medications

The Arthritis Foundation lists six main types of medication to help treat arthritis symptoms:

- Analgesics: painkillers such as over-the-counter acetaminophen and prescribed opioids
- Nonsteroidal [anti-inflammatory drugs](#) (NSAIDs): inflammation and pain-reducing medications, including over-the-counter aspirin and certain prescribed drugs like celecoxib (Celebrex)
- Corticosteroids: fast-acting medications that mimic your natural cortisol to help reduce [joint inflammation](#), especially over the short term
- Disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARDs): slow-acting anti-inflammatory medications to treat arthritis symptoms over the longer term
- Targeted DMARDs: synthetic DMARDs that block parts of the immune system to reduce inflammation
- Biologics: natural (cell-derived) DMARDs that block parts of the immune system to reduce inflammation.

U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH) joint specialist Dr. Michael Ombrello noted in a newsletter that biologics can be particularly helpful for treating severe arthritis in children.

"Biologics have really changed the face of juvenile arthritis," he said, explaining that the medication helps reduce children's reliance on wheelchairs and crutches.

For additional information on arthritis medications, American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) spokesperson Maura Iversen recommends the Arthritis Foundation's [Drug Guide](#) as a useful tool to help understand "what the medication is, what it targets in your body, how long it takes to work, [and] what are some potential side effects."

Non-medication arthritis treatments

There are several natural ways to manage your arthritis pain. The Arthritis Foundation states that eating a [healthy diet](#), exercising regularly, applying heat and cold to your joints, and taking short 15-minute breaks to rest throughout the day can help improve your symptoms. Research published recently in the [Annals of Internal Medicine](#) showed that even [light exercise](#) can help ease the pain of arthritic knees and give you wider range of motion.

Therapies for arthritis include massage, acupuncture, biofeedback and cognitive behavioral therapy. The foundation also recommends working with a physical therapist to improve your posture and range of motion.

Iversen, who is also dean of the College of Health Professions at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, Conn., pointed out that when physical therapists create an exercise plan, they consider the type of arthritis you're diagnosed with, where in the body it manifests, its severity and whether you're in remission or are experiencing a flare-up.

"All of that is taken into account, into the individual exercise programs that a physical therapist would prescribe," she explained.

Iversen suggested several physical activity programs that are supported by [APTA](#) to help improve arthritis pain and other symptoms, including those offered through the [Arthritis Foundation](#).

"The YMCA has a long, long history, at least in my 30-year career, of partnering with the Arthritis Foundation to offer aerobic programs for patients with arthritis," she noted. "There's also a walking program [and] we are fortunate nowadays with mobile apps where you can download a health app."

Arthritis surgery treatments

Dr. Paul DeMarco, Rheumatology Fellowship Training Program Director at the National Institute for Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases (NIAMS), explained that "surgery can be very helpful in the right situation, and especially important before joint pain affects sleep, results in an inability to exercise or causes the joint to be limited."

You have several surgery options to choose from to help treat your arthritis pain, depending on how it affects your body, according to the Arthritis Foundation:

- Arthroscopy: surgeons use a camera and a small incision to find and repair damaged tissues, cartilage and ligaments around the knees, shoulders, hips and other joints
- Total joint replacement (arthroplasty surgery): a joint (typically in the hip or knee) is replaced with an implant
- Joint resurfacing or partial joint replacement surgery: part of a joint is replaced with an implant
- Joint revision surgery: a damaged, malfunctioning or infected

implant is replaced

- Arthrodesis or fusion surgery: hardware such as pins are used to join two or more bones together to keep the joint locked in place
- Osteotomy: a wedge is added to a bone or the bone is partially or completely removed to move weight off of an area that's been damaged by arthritis
- Synovectomy: the lining of a joint is partially or fully removed to help limit the damage to surrounding cartilage.

If you'd like more information on arthritis treatments, Iversen recommends the [APTA's ChoosePT and Find a PT](#) resources. You can also check out Arthritis Foundation's [Treatment Guides](#) for additional therapies and surgeries to help improve your arthritis pain.

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