
Arthritis

What is Arthritis?

Arthritis is a disease that affects the joints, muscles and tendons. The most common types are rheumatoid arthritis and osteoarthritis. It causes stiff joints, pain and fatigue. It is a chronic condition and can last years. Arthritis can affect people of all ages from infants to the elderly. Some people are only mildly affected while others are severely affected.

Who gets it?

Anyone can get arthritis. Arthritis is most common in elderly people but about 1 child in 1,000 in New Zealand suffers from a form of juvenile arthritis. Women are more likely to get arthritis than men are.

Types of Arthritis

Rheumatoid Arthritis

Rheumatoid arthritis is an inflammation of the synovial lining of the joint. It is often associated with inflammation of other body tissues. It can cause tiredness, aching in the muscles and loss of appetite. If not properly treated it can progressively damage joints and cause joint deformities. Almost any joint can be affected. It usually occurs in people between the ages of 20 and 55.

Osteoarthritis

Osteoarthritis involves the breakdown of the cartilage padding of the joints. It usually occurs later in life and in people who have put extra demands on their joints, for example, sports people or people who are very overweight. It is likely to affect weight-bearing joints such as hips, knees, spine and hands.

Symptoms

- Swelling in one or more joints.
- Early morning joint stiffness (rheumatoid arthritis).
- Not able to move a joint normally.
- Redness and warmth in a joint.
- Unexplained weight loss, fever or weakness with joint pain.
- Joint stiffness after long periods of sitting or lying (rheumatoid arthritis)

- Joint pain after exercise or movement (osteoarthritis).

Symptoms vary greatly between individuals. There may be periods of remission when the person gets better or periods when the arthritis flares up.

Treatment

Arthritis is treated with a combination of exercise and medication, which varies from pain relief and anti-inflammatory medication such as aspirin to anti-rheumatoid medication such as gold salts.

How to Best Care for a Person with Arthritis

- Many aids are available to make everyday tasks easier.
- Plan outings you can take at any time so you can make full use of remission periods to enjoy yourselves. Also make back up plans in case of flare ups.
- The person with arthritis will want to be as independent as possible. Be ready to help but don't assume that you need to do everything.
- If the person suffers from arthritis to a crippling degree you may need help caring for them.
- If the person can no longer do the activities they once enjoyed, try to look for alternative activities.

Where to go for Support

Arthritis Foundation

The Arthritis Foundation exists to improve the health and well being of people affected with arthritis. They provide education, public awareness, lobbying and research funding. They also have field officers to provide direct support to sufferers and their families.

For more information phone 04 472 1427 or phone the Canterbury Arthritis society on 03 366 8383

Caring for Carers

Joining a carer support group can relieve some of the stress you are under as a carer. The constant tasks, the concerns, grief, drama, moments of joy, frustration

and exhaustion are all part of the day to day existence of a carer.

As a carer, it is important to remember that you are an individual with needs of your own. Ensure that you take care of yourself by arranging your day so that you have some time for yourself. Meeting with other carers can also ease the loneliness that carers can often experience.

Caring for Carers has a Newsletter and several support meetings each month and ongoing telephone support. These services are provided to help make your job easier.

Caring for Carers is situated:

4th floor, Securities House
221 Gloucester Street, Christchurch.
Postal address: P O Box 13 167, Christchurch
Phone: 377 8426
Fax: 377 8420
Email: caringforcarers@xtra.co.nz