

MEDICAL MONDAYS | News Notes

Dr. R. Deaver Collins, Jr. | Rheumatologist

TOPIC: BEATING ARTHRITIS

AdvancedHEALTH : Nashville Arthritis & Rheumatology

March 03, 2017

News Notes via www.webMD.com

Arthritis Overview

Common arthritis symptoms of pain and stiffness are usually caused by degenerative arthritis (osteoarthritis). The more than 100 types of arthritis include osteoarthritis, which is age-related wear and tear; rheumatoid arthritis; gout; lupus; and fibromyalgia.

Overall, 54 million adults -- or one in four -- report an arthritis diagnosis. And the number of people disabled by it has jumped 20 percent since 2002.

The joint aches, stiffness and swelling of arthritis can make holding a glass, carrying a grocery bag, or walking a short distance difficult or even impossible.

Why so many Americans have arthritis isn't clear, and can't be attributed solely to an aging population. Almost two of five adults with arthritis are of working age -- 18 to 64 years old, the CDC said.

Diagnosing Arthritis

- In addition to symptoms and a doctor's exam, **blood tests and X-rays are commonly used to confirm rheumatoid arthritis.**
 - The majority of people with rheumatoid arthritis have an antibody called **rheumatoid factor (RF)** in their blood.
 - A newer test for rheumatoid arthritis that measures levels of antibodies in the blood (**called the anti-CCP test**) **is more specific and tends to be only elevated in patients with rheumatoid arthritis or in patients about to develop rheumatoid arthritis.**
 - The presence of anti-CCP antibodies can also be used to predict which patients will get more severe rheumatoid arthritis.
 - X-rays are used to diagnose osteoarthritis, typically revealing an uneven loss of cartilage and spurring of the underlying bone.
 - Sometimes blood tests and **joint aspiration (using a needle to draw a small sample of fluid from the joint for testing)** are used to rule out other types of arthritis

Treating Arthritis

The goal of treatment is to prevent long-term joint and organ damage.

- **Reach for Remission**

Rather than just soothing pain and allowing you to “get by,” doctors have the tools and medicines available to completely quiet many types of inflammatory arthritis. When your symptoms are nearly gone and the doctor says your joints aren’t inflamed anymore, that’s called remission.

- **Treat-to- Target**

Some doctors use a strategy called treat-to-target when working with you to come up with a treatment plan. The idea is that you and your doctor work closely together to decide on a goal (the ideal goal is low disease activity or remission) and a plan to reach that goal. You then have regular checkups to see how you’re doing (every 3 months, for example). Your doctor will adjust your medicines and other treatments until you reach your goal.

- **Lifestyle Changes Matter Too**

Medicines don’t work on their own. Any medicine will work better if you combine it with lifestyle changes. Losing weight (when needed), keeping your cholesterol and blood pressure under control, and stopping smoking will all improve your health and quality of life.

- **Sticking to Your Medicine Plan Matters**

Even if you start to feel better or don’t like medication side effects, and you want to stop taking a medication, don’t. Low-level inflammation throughout your body may still be causing joint and organ damage. It’s important to stick with your treatment plan and talk to your doctor about your concerns. If you don’t take your medicine, your doctor won’t know what is or is not working so she won’t know when or how to switch your medications.

- **Don’t Settle for “Good Enough”**

What happens is that people achieve a level of tolerable pain, meaning that they can deal with it and live their lives. Until you reach low disease activity or remission, don’t give up. You don’t need to settle for just getting by – and you shouldn’t let your doctor either. Just because you feel “okay” doesn’t mean your disease is under control. Keep working with your doctor to find a treatment that eliminates your inflammation and pain.

Coping with Arthritis

- **Take Action Early**

- The most important step you can take is to seek help as soon as you feel less able to cope with your arthritis. Taking action early will enable you to understand and deal with the many effects of a chronic illness.

- **Exercise Your Joints**

- Moving all of your joints will help you. The doctor or nurse can show you how to move more easily. Going for a walk every day will help, too.

- Manage your Stress
 - If you have arthritis, the stress can build and influence how you feel about life. Prolonged stress can lead to frustration, anger, hopelessness, and, at times, [depression](#).

- Try to Keep your Weight Down by Avoid Foods that Cause Inflammation
 - Sugars
 - Trans Fats
 - Saturated Fats
 - Omega 6 Fatty Acids
 - Refined Carbohydrates
 - MSG
 - Gluten and Casein
 - Aspartame (artificial sweetener)
 - Alcohol

- Take your medicines when and how you are supposed to. They can help reduce pain and stiffness.

- Try taking a warm shower in the morning.

- See your doctor regularly.

- Seek information that can help you.

Top 3 Types of Arthritis

Osteoarthritis

- **What is it**

More people have this condition than any other form of [arthritis](#). It's the "wear and tear" that happens when your joints are overused. It usually happens with age, but it can also come from joint injuries or [obesity](#), which puts extra stress on your joints.
- **What happens**

You lose your body's shock absorber. Cartilage, the slippery material that covers the ends of bones, gradually breaks down.
- **Symptoms**
 - Deep, aching pain
 - Trouble dressing, combing hair, gripping things, bending over, squatting, or climbing stairs. depending on which joints are involved
 - Morning stiffness for less than an hour
 - Pain when walking
 - Stiffness after resting
 - Your joint may be:

- Warm to the touch
- Swollen and harder to move
- Unable to move through a full range of motion

Rheumatoid Arthritis

- **What is it**
RA is an **autoimmune disease**. That means the immune system attacks parts of the body, especially the joints. That leads to inflammation, which can cause severe joint damage if you don't treat it. About 1 out of every 5 people who have rheumatoid arthritis get lumps on their skin called rheumatoid nodules.
- **What Happens**
Doctors don't know exactly what causes RA. Some experts believe the **immune system becomes "confused" after infection with a bacteria or virus and starts to attack your joints**. This battle can spread to other areas of the body.
- **Symptoms**
 - You may **feel pain and stiffness and have swelling in your hands, wrists, elbows, shoulders, knees, ankles, feet, jaw, and neck**.
 - There tends to be a **symmetrical pattern**, too. When the knuckles on your left hand are inflamed, the knuckles on your right hand probably will be as well. After some time, you may notice more of your joints feel warm or become painful or swollen.

Psoriatic Arthritis

- **What is it**
 - People with this condition have **inflammation of the skin (psoriasis) and joints (arthritis)**.
 - Psoriasis causes **patchy, raised, red, and white areas of inflamed skin with scales**. It usually affects the tips of the elbows and knees, the scalp, the navel, and skin around the genital areas or **anus**.
- **What Happens**
This type of arthritis usually starts between ages 30 and 50, but it can start as early as childhood. It's equally common among men and women. The skin disease (psoriasis) usually shows up first.
- **Symptoms**
 - **Psoriatic arthritis** can swell the fingers and toes. People who have it often have **fungernails** that are pitted or discolored, too.
 - In some people, only one joint or a few joints are affected. For example, you could have it in only one knee. Sometimes it affects **the spine** or just the fingers and toes.