Bone and Joint Health Action Week is Held Annually October 12-20

This presents an opportunity to learn about conditions that affect bone and joint health and how to treat, manage, and prevent those conditions. Unfortunately, a single news column is not nearly enough space to share about the many conditions that affect bone and joint health. I have decided to take this opportunity to share about one of the more common ones, osteoarthritis. The following information is from the National Institutes of Health. More information can be found at niams.nih.gov and bones.nih.gov.

What Is Arthritis?
When people talk about having arthritis, they are usually talking about problems with their joints. The problems can affect any joint in the body: hands, knees, hips, neck, and lower back. There are many different types of arthritis with different causes and treatments. Osteoarthritis is the most common type of arthritis and is more common in older people. OA is a joint disease that usually happens when the tissues in the joint break down over time. OA can be painful, but there are things you can do to feel better. By learning about the disease and taking part in your care, you can learn to manage the symptoms to help you live an active lifestyle.

What Are the Symptoms of Osteoarthritis?

When you have OA, you may feel pain when using the joint, joint stiffness, usually lasting less than 30 minutes, swelling in and around the joint, changes in how you can move the joint, like the joint is loose or unstable, pain and other joint symptoms may lead you to feel tired, have problems sleeping, and feel depressed. Remember, there are things you can do to help improve your joint pain and stiffness. It is important to visit your doctor, who can suggest and prescribe treatments that may lessen your pain and help you feel better. Be sure to keep track of your symptoms so your doctor has a full picture of what you are feeling. Also, bring a list of medications and supplements you take to your doctor’s appointment.

How Do Doctors Recognize Osteoarthritis?

There is no one test that shows if you have OA. Your doctor may ask about your medical and family history, do a physical exam to check your general health, reflexes, and problem joints, get images of your joints by sending you for x-rays or MRIs, order blood tests and other screenings to make sure there are no other causes of your symptoms, such as an infection.

How Do Doctors Treat Osteoarthritis?

Treating OA usually includes:
Exercising, which can lower joint pain and stiffness and increase flexibility and muscle strength. Remember to start any exercise program slowly after talking to your doctor.
Managing your weight to help lower the stress on joints. If you are overweight or obese, losing weight can help to lower pain, prevent more injury, and improve movement in your joints. This can be especially helpful for your knees or hips.
Using braces or other orthotics that your doctor prescribes and that are fitted by a health care professional.
Some people may need medications to help manage the symptoms of OA. Your doctor may recommend surgery if your joint problems are severe and all other treatments tried have not
helped. However, surgery is not right for everyone, and your doctor will help you decide if it’s best for you.

You may hear or read about other types of therapies to help treat your OA. For example, massage can increase blood flow and bring warmth to the area, and acupuncture may help relieve pain. Doctors believe that the needles help release natural, pain-relieving chemicals made by the nervous system. Before taking any medicines or using other therapies, talk to your doctor.

How to Help Manage Osteoarthritis

There are many things you can do to help manage and live with OA. Start by working with your doctor to set up a treatment plan that works for you. Learning as much as you can about OA from reliable sources can help, too. Some people find it helpful to take a class or talk with a community health worker to learn about the disease and how to manage the symptoms to allow you to live an active lifestyle.

Here are some other tips that may help:

Try using heat and cold therapies because they can lower joint pain. Heat therapy can improve blood flow. Cold therapy can numb nerves around the painful joint and help with swelling.

Use a cane or walker when you need it. They can help you move around safely, provide stability, and lower pain.

If you have arthritis in your hands, you may find it helpful to use devices such as jar openers to help you grip.

Try to avoid repeated motions, such as frequent bending.

Shoe inserts or braces can help support your joint and help lower pain and pressure in the area. This can be helpful when you stand or walk.

Exercise is important to help you keep, or improve, your daily living skills. Start slowly, it may take some time for you to adjust to the new activity. Some exercise choices may include:

Walking. Low-impact aerobics in person or video classes. Balance exercises, such as tai chi or yoga. Swimming or water aerobics. Use weights or exercise bands to strengthen muscles.

UPCOMING BONE AND JOINT STRENGTHENING OPPORTUNITY:

Stay Strong Stay Healthy classes will begin on Monday, October 24th at the Scandia Library. Join us Monday and Wednesday evenings, starting Monday, October 24th, at the Scandia Library (318 4TH ST Scandia, KS). Classes will be 5:00-6:00 PM. There will be a total of 16 classes. The first class will be closer to 90 minutes long as there will be a brief orientation and fitness assessment conducted just before starting the exercise class. Water and snacks will be provided at each class. The program fee is $20 but due to local funding, the fee has temporarily been reduced to $0. I REPEAT, THIS IS A FREE CLASS! This class will be limited to 10 participants so please register in advance. Call 785-243-8185 or email kaitlinmoore@ksu.edu.

Questions about bone and joint health or the upcoming Stay Strong Stay Healthy program can be directed to Kaitlin Moore, Food and Health Agent, at 785-243-8185, kaitlinmoore@ksu.edu.

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