

Understanding Your Body

FACTS TO HELP YOU HELP YOURSELF

Loosening The Painful Grip Of Arthritis

(NAPSA)—More than 43 million Americans have arthritis. It is the leading cause of disability among Americans over 15 and affects 60 percent of the U.S. population over 65. If it's left untreated, people with arthritis can experience constant pain, which can be extreme at times and affect activities of daily life such as working, walking and sleeping.

Arthritis causes inflammation, pain and stiffness in the joints and connective tissues such as muscles, cartilage, ligaments and tendons. The condition is chronic, and can cause cartilage and bone to deteriorate over time. Usually, arthritis will cause stiffness, rigidity and tissue damage. In addition, the muscles surrounding the joint weaken as mobility decreases, further injuring the joints.

There are more than 100 rheumatic diseases classified as arthritis, and each type has a distinct set of characteristic symptoms. The most common form of arthritis is osteoarthritis, which may afflict as many as 18 million Americans, including 80 percent of Americans over 75. It occurs when bone cartilage breaks down and stops protecting the ends of the bones. The rubbing together of the bones deforms the joint and causes bone spurs, leading to achy, swollen joints.

Pain can be one of the most difficult aspects of dealing with



Over 43 million Americans suffer from arthritis.

arthritis. Optimal care for people with arthritis means determining what can be done to slow or correct the underlying disorder.

According to the Arthritis Foundation, it is important that you get your condition diagnosed and treated as early as possible. Most treatment regimens include a combination of exercise, weight control, joint protection, physical and occupational therapy and medication. Research has shown that physical activity decreases pain, improves function and delays disability. Try to get at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity at least three days a week.

Your doctor may be able to help you deal with chronic pain if you tell him or her you are experiencing it. For more information, go to www.partnersagainstpain.com.