

Arthritis: 16 Bad Habits That Cause Joint Pain

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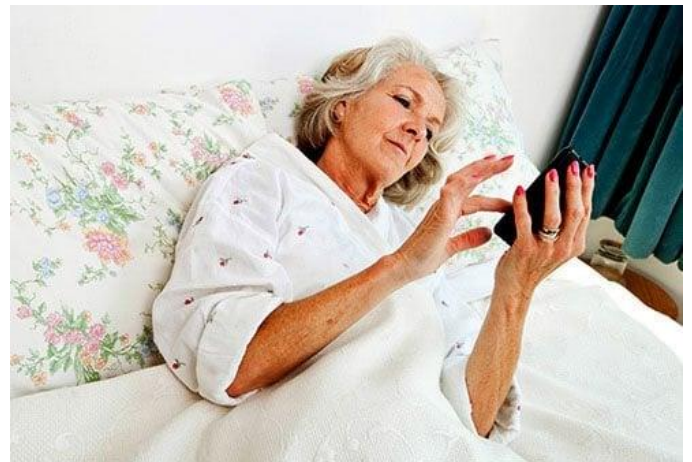
Being Overweight or Obese

People who are overweight or obese are more likely to develop arthritis. Research has shown that for every pound that you weigh, your knees have 4 pounds of stress on them. Extra weight also burdens joints in your hips, back, and feet. Additional weight places increased strain and wear and tear on your joints. In addition to the physical stress that increased weight places on joints, fat secretes inflammatory chemicals that may also cause joint pain and increase the risk of arthritis and other chronic conditions. Some types of inflammatory molecules may promote the development of osteoarthritis (OA) and rheumatoid arthritis (RA), two conditions that affect joints. Osteoarthritis is the so-called "wear-and-tear" type of arthritis where cartilage is damaged in the affected joints. Rheumatoid arthritis is an autoimmune condition where the immune system attacks and damages joints.



Texting with Your Thumb

Texting stresses joints in your hands, especially your thumbs. Texting with your thumbs puts them in awkward and often hyperextended positions that irritate the tendons. Texting with your thumbs places 12 times the pressure on thumb joints that it does on the tips of the thumbs. Experts say your thumbs are responsible for 60 percent of the functioning of your hands. So, you need your thumbs in good working order! Minimize thumb texting or use the voice function to keep texting hands free. Texting can be bad for your shoulders and neck, too. Hunching over to look at your phone while texting stresses your neck and shoulders. Bending your neck all the way forward so your chin is touching your chest places a tremendous amount of strain on your neck.



Wearing High Heels

High heels place your feet in an awkward position that stresses joints, strains muscles, and can throw your back out of alignment. Wearing heels makes your thigh muscles work harder to keep your knees straight. It also places dangerous twisting forces on your knees. Women who wear heels daily may increase their risk of developing osteoarthritis and foot pain. High heels, sandals, and slippers are considered poor shoes because they provide inadequate support for feet. Swap high heels and other poor shoe styles for supportive walking shoes or sneakers to keep foot, knee, and back pain at bay.



Wearing Unsupportive Shoes

Wearing ill-fitting, worn out, or unsupportive footwear is a risk factor for developing osteoarthritis, foot pain, joint pain, and joint problems. Poor footwear includes any type of shoe that does not adequately support your feet or ankles. It also includes shoes that place your feet in awkward or uncomfortable positions. Poor footwear choices include high heels, slippers, and sandals. If you are playing sports, make sure to choose appropriate footwear for the type of activity you are engaging in. For example, tennis shoes have good side support so you minimize the risk of rolling your ankle. You can have too much of a good thing. Too much cushioning or arch support may cause pain because it places feet in an awkward position and they cannot move naturally. This may lead to arthritis.



Cracking Your Knuckles

Some people develop a bad habit of cracking their knuckles. The sound results from ligaments that snap against bone or from fluid bubbles that burst around the joints. It is a myth that cracking your knuckles causes arthritis, but it is still a bad habit that you should stop. Results of one study suggest that cracking your knuckles may cause hand swelling and it may even weaken your grip. The best way to break a bad habit may be to replace it with another, healthier habit. Instead of cracking your knuckles, squeeze a stress ball to strengthen muscles in your hands and develop increased grip strength.



Carrying Heavy Backpacks or Bags

Carrying a heavy load on your back, whether it is a backpack, purse, or messenger bag, can place a lot of stress and strain on your neck, shoulders, and back. When you carry a heavy load, it affects your balance and even the way you walk. This is especially true if you like to carry your backpack or bag on only one side. The result is that it stresses muscles and joints on that side of the body and overworks them so they experience more wear and tear. You may experience muscle pain, joint pain, and other symptoms. Lighten your load! Avoid lugging around unnecessary objects. Carry just what you need. Use a backpack over both shoulders to distribute the weight you carry more evenly. If you do carry a purse or messenger bag with one strap, switch sides to avoid placing undue stress on just one side of your body.



Relying on the Wrong Muscles

You have both large and small muscles in your body. When you rely on small muscles to make movements, it places unnecessary stress and strain on joints. Perform physical activities in a way that minimizes stress on joints. Bend at your knees when you lift something heavy off the floor so your thigh muscles, not back muscles, do most of the work. Use your shoulder muscles instead of your finger muscles to open a heavy door. When carrying something, hold it close to your body using the palms of your hands, not your fingers.



Being a Stomach Sleeper

You may snore less when you sleep on your stomach instead of on your back, but the rest of your body may suffer. People who sleep on their stomachs have to twist their heads and necks to the side. This, in turn, places stress on nerves. It also compresses your spine, leading to awkward spinal alignment. You want to sleep in a neutral position so that your head and neck are in a straight line with your spine to reduce the risk of strain on your back, neck, and muscles. Avoid sleeping on your stomach. Switch to sleeping on your side or back. Look for special pillows for side sleepers and back sleepers that promote healthy spine alignment.



Skipping Stretching Is Bad

Regular stretching improves flexibility and eases joint pain. If you do not warm up or stretch before work outs, now is the time to start. It will strengthen muscles and tendons, lubricate joints, and boost your ability to have normal range-of-motion. Ultimately, strong muscles support joint stability, so stretching is a good way to maintain your joint health. Warm up before exercise by doing dynamic or active stretching. This involves doing movements that are similar to those used in the activity or sport that you will be doing. Active stretching boosts blood flow, increases muscle temperature, and gets muscles ready for activity.



Neglecting Strength Training

After the age of 40, bones begin to become a little thinner. They are also more likely to break. Strength training, or resistance training, increases bone mineral density by approximately 1 to 3 percent. Working out with weights stresses bone and triggers the growth of new bone. It also slows the rate of bone loss. The combination of strong muscles and dense bones leads to increased joint stability. This, in turn, makes it less likely that you will suffer injuries. Check with your doctor before starting a strength training program for the first time, especially if you suffer from arthritis pain, knee pain, or back pain. You want to make sure you have medical clearance from your physician before beginning an exercise program.



Smoking and Tobacco Use

Tobacco products are not good for any part of you and that includes your joints. Nicotine decreases blood flow to bones, tissues, and discs in your spine that provide cushioning between vertebrae. Nicotine decreases calcium absorption. Tobacco use also interferes with estrogen in the body. Women need estrogen to maintain healthy bones. Smoking cigarettes inhibits the formation of new bone, so bones are not as dense as they could be if a person did not use tobacco. All of this results in joints that are weaker than they should be and includes an increased possibility of suffering from a broken hip or other joint injury. Another reason to quit



Getting Insufficient or Poor Quality Sleep

The vast majority of people who suffer from arthritis, approximately 80 percent, have difficulty sleeping. When your joints ache or you are experiencing joint inflammation or stiffness, it can make it harder to sleep. Researchers have found that the opposite is also true. If you suffer from sleep problems, they can actually make joint pain (arthralgia) and joint symptoms worse. Sleep difficulties trigger inflammation, which may make joint pain and inflammatory conditions such as some kinds of autoimmune disease, chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia, ankylosing spondylitis, idiopathic arthritis, psoriatic arthritis, gout, osteoarthritis, and rheumatoid arthritis worse.



Having Poor Posture

Your mother always told you to stand up straight. She was right! Having poor posture throws your spine out of alignment and increases stress on muscles and joints. It may also decrease your range-of-motion and flexibility and may throw off your balance. Having poor posture may inhibit your ability to do things for yourself. It also increases the risk of falls. The basics of good posture are simple. Stand up tall with your shoulders back and your head held high. Tighten your abdominal muscles and keep your core strong. If you work at a desk, make sure you have a good ergonomic set up (for example, an adjustable chair) that promotes good posture.



Ignoring Joint Pain

Joint pain is not a symptom that should be ignored. If you have rheumatoid arthritis, osteoarthritis, or another type of degenerative joint condition, waiting to see the doctor may result in permanent joint damage and disability. How do you know when joint pain is a sign of something potentially more serious? See your doctor if your joints are red, swollen, stiff, painful, or warm to the touch. Make an appointment with your physician if joint pain or other symptoms make it difficult to carry out daily activities. If you have joint pain or symptoms that last three days or more, see your doctor. If you suffer several bouts of joint symptoms within a 30-day period, see your doctor.

For minor aches and pains, ask your doctor if it is safe for you to take over-the-counter nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) like ibuprofen or naproxen to relieve joint pain and stiffness. Your doctor can prescribe stronger COX-2 medications or other drugs if you need stronger pain relief treatment. NSAIDs may not be appropriate for you to use for pain relief if you suffer from gastrointestinal bleeding or ulcers.



Sitting Too Long at the Computer

Sitting for too long while working on the computer may lead to pain in your neck, wrists, elbows, shoulders, and back. Bad posture is one culprit that can produce pain. Working too long while sitting in one position is another problem. Muscles become overworked and sitting for long periods of time also increases stress on discs in your back. Use supportive measures to take the strain off your body. Invest in an ergonomic desk chair. Use cushioned gel pads under your forearms and wrists when you type, write, or use a mouse. Set an alarm and get up and move around for at least a few minutes every hour. Sitting too long is not just bad for your joints, it is a risk factor for increased mortality.



Having Poor Form

Playing sports involves performing the same motions over and over again. If you have bad or poor form, you will stress your joints and muscles, increasing the risk for potential injury. Tennis elbow is a common example of an overuse injury. So, if you are starting a sport or a learning how to do a new type of physical activity, get a trainer or take lessons. Learn the correct technique when you first take up a new sport or hobby. That way you will be using proper form and will minimize the risk of developing bad habits that could hurt you later on.



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