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## Maintaining Joint Health

**Orthopedic Surgeon Dr. Brian Lewis discusses a few things we can do today to help maintain our joint health.**

Osteoarthritis is increasingly common and is the result of many things that have happened to your joints over the course of your life. Some of these things, like genetics, we have no control over. If your parents had joint problems or joint replacements at a younger than normal age, then you may be at risk as well. Injury is another thing that we may have no control over. If you tore your ACL in high school, you have an increased risk of developing arthritis in that knee later in life. However, there are some things that we may control.

In my opinion, our biggest modifiable factor that's associated with increasing joint problems and the development of osteoarthritis is our weight. Being overweight or obese is associated with increased rates of osteoarthritis, especially in the knee.<sup>1</sup>

Maintaining a healthy weight is important to sustain joint health. Finding ways to reduce your weight has been associated with overall improved joint health and joint pain, even in patients with known joint problems. Much of this can be accomplished through changes in your diet as well as many of the low impact and body-weight exercises. If you need help, please reach out to specialists like your primary care physician, a nutritionist, an obesity medicine specialist, or a weight loss clinic.

Another thing to note is that there is a difference between having arthritis and having symptomatic arthritis. Many people have X-ray results showing that they have arthritis, but they have no or few symptoms. One of the reasons this can occur is because they have maintained a healthy level of activity.

Our bodies are made to move, which can be challenging in today's society where so many of us spend a lot of time in cars and behind desks. However, finding ways to stay active is often beneficial to our joints. This may mean that some people would be better off with activities like biking or swimming rather than logging miles running or walking. The key is finding activities that you enjoy but won't aggravate your joints.

Another key is making sure that you continue to stretch your joints and strengthen your muscles. For many people, due to the excessive time spent sitting, strengthening the gluteal and core muscles are key areas on which to focus.

Now, I mentioned earlier that we can't **reverse** injuries that may have occurred in the past, but injury prevention will help keep our joints healthy in the future. This includes prevention of both acute and chronic injuries. There are many circumstances in which acute injuries may not be preventable, but proper warm-ups and stretching may help in some cases.<sup>2</sup> It's important to listen to your body. If you are in the middle of game/exercise/activity and begin to experience pain, that's a sign that what you're doing is causing damage and you should stop or change that activity.

Chronic injuries can often times be a result of not listening to what our bodies are trying to tell us. Continuing to play or exercise through pain is unlikely to make things better, and in many cases, may lead to overuse injury. If you're trying to be active and are finding it painful, then you may need to try different exercises. If you're having trouble finding activities to try, trainers, **physiotherapists**, and physicians can help you find ways to stay active without causing pain in your joints.

## References

Written by Dr. Brian Lewis who received remuneration as a Zimmer Biomet consultant for writing this article

1. McAlindon, TE., et al. Osteoarthritis year 2011 in review: clinical. *Osteoarthritis and Cartilage*. 20:197-200; 2012.
2. Woods, K., et al. Warm-up and stretching in the prevention of muscular injury. *Sports Med*. 37(12):1089-99; 2007.

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