



May 19th, 2014

Understanding Arthritis and Fibromyalgia

Arthritis refers to more than 100 conditions with the common symptom of joint pain. About 4.6 million Canadians, age 15 and older, have been diagnosed with at least one of these conditions, including fibromyalgia.

We are slowly getting a better handle on fibromyalgia, which is good news as about two percent of Canadians are living with it. The condition involves specific “tender points” and fatigue, insomnia, headaches, and abdominal pain. Making a clear diagnosis has traditionally been difficult and new guidelines were recently developed which are proving to be easier to use and more reliable. Better diagnosis leads to more effective treatment and improves quality of life.

Regular exercise helps!

Fibromyalgia appears to respond to exercise therapy – a Cochrane Collaboration review of all the literature points to both aerobic and resistance (strength) training as reducing the pain associated with fibromyalgia. Aerobic exercise was statistically better at reducing pain and both types of exercise were equivalent in reducing tenderness. While this lends credence to using these exercises as treatment, the researchers are next going to study other forms, such as aquatics.

People diagnosed with other forms of arthritis, including osteoarthritis, also benefit from exercise. Regular exercise helps to maintain joint function and reduces stiffness, pain and fatigue. Look for exercises that improve flexibility and range of motion, strength and balance. Aerobic exercise improves the cardiovascular system and lung capacity, building endurance and overall health. Avoid activities which are jarring or high impact and be sure to rest if you are suffering from a flare-up.

Stay as active and reduce stiffness!

Arthritis doesn't have to put an end to your activities and interests. Stiffness increases with inactivity (that's why you're so stiff after a night's sleep), so get up and move about regularly. Use parts of your body that are unaffected to help out wherever possible (such as using a shoulder to push open a door) and organize your environment to keep things accessible. Using adaptive devices and gadgets can be very helpful too!

Your pharmacist can provide numerous tips and suggestions to help you cope with arthritis, fibromyalgia and many other conditions. Don't be afraid to ask!