



# Ways to Manage Socializing With Osteoarthritis

by ALI ESFAHANI

---

## Working Through the Difficulty of Socializing With Osteoarthritis

Socializing is such an integral part of being human. Without social interaction, we would not have the advancements in our society and culture.

The benefits of socialization have been well-documented; people who socialize experience lower stress, cope with adverse events better, and are generally healthier. On the other hand, lack of socialization can lead to depression, anxiety and low self-esteem.

Attending special events such as weddings, birthdays and parties is usually something people look forward to. However, for those suffering with the pain of osteoarthritis (OA), it can be a monumental task.

It can be hard to focus on enjoying events and hanging out with peers if you are consistently monitoring your own physical state. The pain and stiffness not only takes a physical toll, but also impacts the manner in which you interact with other people.

## The Downside of Socializing

Attending events can be challenging because of the anxiety, fatigue and difficulty focusing that the pain of arthritis can cause. Living with pain at home can be manageable because it is a controlled environment; you know where to sit, how to avoid pain, what to do to alleviate the pain, and what could potentially trigger the pain.

On the other hand, at events you don't know how long you will have to stand, sit or walk for. Because of this, there is an inherent fear that the social event will bring out the worst of their pain. It can be unnerving to enter the physical unknown, and for that reason some OA sufferers will choose to avoid these types of events altogether.

It has been well-documented that pain can cause fatigue. The spoon theory explains why people with a chronic illness have a reduced amount of energy available for productive tasks during the day.

"Spoons" are used as an intangible unit of measurement to track how much energy a person has every day. Each activity costs a certain amount of spoons and won't be replaced until the next day.

Someone who runs out of spoons loses the ability to do anything other than rest. Disabled or people with chronic diseases must plan their activities to ensure every day is manageable because their disability uses up a lot of their spoons.

Although socializing is still enjoyable, it can use up a lot of energy. That is perfectly fine for healthy people, but people with arthritis often have a limited amount of energy. For this reason, some simply don't see going out as a realistic or worthwhile option.

---

The focus of socializing is about being around friends, family or acquaintances and having a good time. However, it can be difficult to concentrate on your surroundings when your body is screaming at you constantly for attention with the pain. On top of that, the fear and anxiety the pain brings can make it impossible to fully enjoy special events that take several hours.

There are many social impacts of not being able to socialize properly due to the pain of arthritis, including depression and feeling isolated. Oftentimes the result of missing an important social event due to the pain can lead to a depressed state.

Fortunately, there are solutions to help OA sufferers not only attend events, but to also enjoy them: plan ahead, focusing techniques, and add structure to social events.

*Next page: planning ahead, learning to focus on the moment and choosing events carefully.*

## **Plan Ahead**

The best thing you can do is plan ahead if you decide to go to a social event. Figure out the location of the event, how far of a drive it is, and if there is parking nearby.

Try to bring along the proper medication or other pain-alleviating methods just in case. Don't be afraid to ask if there are chairs available, how many intermissions there are, or a place to stretch and relax briefly in case the pain gets bad.

There is no harm in letting your peers know some accommodations may be needed for you to happily attend the event. Keeping open communication with your friends and family can help make planning for social events even easier. Use your problem-solving skills to create solutions and avoid excuses.

## **Focus**

Although it may be hard to focus on enjoying socialization, you can try numerous methods during an event to help bring back the focus on socializing. Relaxation and positive visualization can all be helpful methods of allowing one to ease the pain and retool their thinking.

Each of these techniques can help train your body to relax muscles and reduce chemical stress responses that are harmful to your body. You might not be able to break out into full meditation during a social event, but a bathroom break or deepening of one's breathing to relax is realistic.

## **Add Structure to Social Events**

Social events need to be more structured for an arthritic sufferer to have a good time through the pain. Although socialization is encouraged and important, you should plan to attend social events that are within reason of your limitations.

You will also need to be careful regarding how you spend your time in social situations, in order to avoid fatigue and save energy. Some types of social events and activities are going to be more conducive than others; dinner and date nights are probably more reasonable to a chronic arthritic sufferer than long and cumbersome rock concerts.

Socializing is instrumental to humans for development and a sense of general well-being. Unfortunately, osteoarthritis can make enjoying important social events difficult.

The pain can make it hard to focus on having a good time, increase anxiety towards the unknown, or sap your energy. Missing social events due to the pain of OA can magnify the pain, make living with the pain seem that much harder, or give you the feeling of isolation.

---

Fortunately, there are a couple of ways to combat the pain that could hamper your ability to attend social events; planning ahead, adding structure to social events, and intense focus methods can all help one to improve the experience of attending an event despite the pain.

Even though OA can make socializing more difficult, you can still enjoy socializing with enough creativity and persistence.