



# Natural Pain Relief

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## Physical Activity, Thermotherapy, and Acupuncture to Relieve Osteoarthritis

Osteoarthritis is caused by the breakdown of healthy cartilage in the joints. Cartilage is firm, rubbery tissue that cushions the joints to prevent bones from rubbing together. The degeneration of the cartilage in the joints causes the bones rub together causing swelling, stiffness and pain. It is the most common form of arthritis, and can be a debilitating, painful and uncomfortable condition.

Oftentimes, a patient with osteoarthritis will be prescribed anti-inflammatory medication by a doctor to help reduce swelling and pain. Prescription medication is not always something people like to take, especially as a long term solution. There are a number of natural methods of pain relief that can, and should be explored to help reduce pain associated with osteoarthritis. The most effective way to reduce the pain associated with osteoarthritis is to implement a weight loss plan. Being overweight can put tremendous stress on the joints that are affected by osteoarthritis, so maintaining a healthy lifestyle including a balanced diet and exercise is a major step in reducing pain.

Once a weight loss plan is set into motion, there are other ways to help reduce pain associated osteoarthritis without the use of prescription medications. There are some foods that have been identified to have anti-inflammatory properties, and are highly recommended for those dealing with the pain of osteoarthritis. These foods include mustard, garlic, ginger, onions, horseradish, watercress, celery, pickles, lemon, parsley and rose-hip tea. Foods that are high in omega-3 fatty acids are also recommended, as these can help to reduce inflammation in the affected joints. Omega-3s can be found in fish, seeds and nuts.

Physical activity is an important part to any weight loss plan. Exercises that can help to reduce the pain associated with osteoarthritis include Pilates, yoga, Tai chi. All of these physical activities help to strengthen and relax muscles, while focusing the mind away from the pain the body is feeling.

Thermotherapy (ice and heat therapy) has been found to help a large group of patients dealing with osteoarthritis. The heat works to increase the circulation in the joint and to relax the muscles, and the cold can numb the pain by cooling nerve impulses to the joint. Cold will also help to decrease swelling in the joints by constricting the blood vessels, which will help to increase range of motion and reduce pain levels. Ice baths and hydrotherapy can help to increase the range of motion in the affected joints as well.

Acupuncture involves inserting thin needles into specified pressure points on the body to help relieve pain. It is thought that acupuncture is beneficial for those dealing with osteoarthritis, because it helps to alleviate the pain and can improve joint function. Along the same lines, massage therapy can also be helpful for those dealing with the pain of osteoarthritis as well. A massage therapist will stroke or knead the sore muscles around the affected joints, and this can stimulate blood flow to help relax the stressed area. It is important to find a massage therapist who specializes in treating osteoarthritis to ensure that the affected joints are not irritated further.

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