Coping Techniques

by MARLENE WALLACE

How Marlene Manages Her Osteoarthritis

I developed osteoarthritis of the cervical and lumbar spine over 20 years ago as a result of a fall. Just recently, I injured my knee as the result of a very minor slip. X-rays showed that I have moderate arthritis in my knees as well. The affected knee has been very swollen, stiff and painful for almost four months and surgery may be required. Let's take a look at some coping techniques for osteoarthritis.

While osteoarthritis cannot be cured, it can be managed effectively with several types of medical and home treatments. As a medical professional, I know how important it is to continue beneficial treatments on an ongoing basis to alleviate associated bothersome symptoms.

The main goals of treatment are to relieve pain and increase both the strength and mobility of any affected joint(s). My treatment plan generally includes:

- **Anti-arthritis medications.** I use both an OTC pain reliever (Extra Strength Tylenol) and a prescription anti-inflammatory drug (Naproxen).
- **Exercise.** I use walking, yoga and Pilates to stretch and strengthen my muscles and maintain as much joint mobility as possible.
- **Frequent application of heat and/or cold packs.** I use cold to reduce any inflammation as well as heat to relieve any pain or stiffness.
- **Bracing for protection.** I recently had a hinged brace prescribed for my injured knee to promote healing. It was helpful for the first 6 to 8 weeks.
- **Chiropractic treatments to achieve correct joint alignment.** I have monthly maintenance adjustments on my neck and back.
- **Monthly massage therapy and acupuncture treatments.** Combing both of these will help to alleviate pain and inflammation. I find these alternative therapies very helpful in controlling my arthritis.

While it is not possible to completely stop osteoarthritis from developing as a result of normal aging, there are certain lifestyle habits that you can practice to lessen arthritis risks. You can also try to prevent or slow permanent joint damage. I try to include all of the following recommendations regularly:

- **Maintain a healthy weight.** Excess pounds place unnecessary stress on weight-bearing joints like the hips and knees.
- **Exercise.** It is essential to keep your muscles as strong as possible. Doing so helps protect and support the associated joints.
- **Always practice safe lifting techniques.** Maintain proper posture when sitting, standing and walking. This helps protect your joints and muscles from being injured or damaged.
- **Eat a healthy diet.** Foods that are high in both calcium and vitamin D help strengthen bones and muscles. Take vitamin/mineral supplements as recommended by your doctor.

Foods High in Calcium Include:

- Dairy products.
- Soy/almond milk.
- Spinach.
- Okra.
- Collards.
- Kale.
- White beans.
- Soybeans.
- Fish such as salmon, sardines, rainbow trout and perch.
- Foods fortified with calcium including orange juice, oatmeal and breakfast cereals.

Vitamin D is Found In:

- Fatty fish such as tuna, mackerel and salmon. For example, a 6-ounce serving of cooked salmon contains at least 600 international units (IU) of Vitamin D.
- Vitamin D fortified foods including dairy products (e.g. milk, cheese, etc.), soy milk, orange juice, and certain cereals.
- Egg yolks.
- Beef livers.

Hopefully you can use some of these coping techniques to help you through your osteoarthritis.