



What Not to Say to Someone With Arthritis

by ALI ESFAHANI

Unhelpful Comments to Avoid

Osteoarthritis can be very difficult and frustrating to live with. Unfortunately it is also difficult for many people to understand how hard it can be to live with osteoarthritis.

The people who lack understanding can come in the form of family, friends, significant others, strangers, and even doctors. The reactions of other people, who might lack an understanding of arthritis and suggest you are faking or exaggerating your pain to avoid work or family responsibilities, can be distressful.

People with OA need understanding and support, but the people in their lives may seem unsympathetic or even hostile.

Part of the reason people react this way is because there is no “shock factor” with osteoarthritis. Unlike other diseases, such as cancer or ALS, there is not much in the way of visible symptoms with arthritis. Your hair doesn’t fall out, your skin doesn’t peel off, and you don’t lose control of your muscles. No one can tell by looking at you on the surface that you have a medical deficit.

On top of that, chances are the pain isn’t going to put your life at risk, so a lot of people chalk it up as something you’ll just have to deal with. Because there is no shock factor, people will assume that your arthritis is not really a big deal.

Due to some of these reasons, people may unintentionally make hurtful comments to those with arthritis. Here’s what not to say to someone with arthritis:

"It's all in your head."

Although a positive mindset has been proven to help one cope with pain and arthritis, that does not mean the condition is all in the sufferer’s head. Even with the newest developments in MRI and x-ray, some forms of arthritis can’t be seen, but are definitely there.

"You don't look sick to me."

Even if this is intended as a compliment, it is truly one of the worst things you can say to someone suffering from arthritis. This is because the statement belittles their pain and subtly implies that they are faking their arthritic pain.

"At least it won't kill you."

It is true that arthritis won’t kill a person, but it can severely affect the quality of one’s life. Most arthritis sufferers realize that their condition won’t put their life at risk, but that does not make living with their condition any easier.

Similar to the previous statements, it also undermines the legitimacy of their struggle with the disease.

"Just push through it — mind over matter!"

Again, a positive attitude and willingness to persevere despite adversity are great traits to have. But our society takes it a step further by celebrating athletes who play hurt and lauds the phrase, "No pain, no gain."

This might be true in certain cases, but chronic conditions like arthritis can't simply be willed out of the way by brute force and lifting heavier weights. Often times "pushing through" the pain caused by arthritis can make it worse and lead to a flare-up.

"You just need to exercise more and lose weight."

Although the pain from arthritis can be minimized with the proper nutrition and exercise program, it does not always work to reduce the pain.

Additionally, when you say this you're implying that the arthritis sufferer is at fault for their pain due to a poor lifestyle. Many arthritis sufferers already live with guilt that they could have prevented their condition or that they are not doing enough, and telling them this may simply add to that.

"I know exactly how you feel, I have _____ condition."

This is another one of those statements that is often said with good intentions but ends up undermining the feelings and struggles of a person with arthritis. Every condition is different and comes with different challenges. Even though both people can share in their health struggles, it is simply unfair to compare the severity of one condition to another