# Positive Coping Strategies for Arthritis Patients

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## Coping With Arthritis

As soon as the diagnosis comes in, you begin coping. Your mind and your body start to absorb the information and you begin to develop a plan of action to get through the coming days, weeks, months and years. Coping with osteoarthritis does not happen overnight.

Coping with arthritis takes time, effort and patience on your part and on the part of the people around you. Positive coping involves making tough choices and passing up instant gratification while holding out for deferred gratification.

The worst kinds of coping happen quickly and chaotically. They seem to be helping the situation when, in actuality, they are making things worse in the long-term.

Rather than waiting for coping to “just happen,” decide from the beginning that you want to take an active role in way deal with your diagnosis.

Think about the level of commitment you can devote to the cause of positive coping. Consider how you will respond when things are stacked against you. Lastly, ponder the risks and benefits of positive coping versus negative coping. Does the decision seem difficult?

Here’s a break down of positive and negative coping that can help your decision-making.

**Negative coping is:**

- Easy because it takes no effort, energy or time.
- Focused on the short-term because you only do what is best for today without regards for what the outcomes will be.
- A completely selfish process or selfless process. There is no sense of balance. You are only doing what feels good in the moment.
- Interested in emphasizing negative emotions like depression, anger, frustration and denial.
- Interested in emphasizing negative behaviors like overeating, oversleeping, impulsivity and self-medication in the form of drug use and an excessive intake of alcohol with osteoarthritis.
- Setting yourself up for a crash later in the coping process.

The lure of negative coping is the ease and lack of effort needed to cope negatively. Once it pulls you in, it has you trapped because turning negative coping into positive coping later feels very trying and uncomfortable. You might be better off starting with positive coping.

*Next page: positive coping and finding a good doctor.*

**Positive coping is:**

- Labor intensive. It demands a lot of effort, energy and time.
- Focused on the long-term benefit of you and the people around you.
- A perfect combination of selfless and selfishness. At times in positive coping, you have to be selfish, but in the end, everyone wins.
- Interested in acknowledging and processing negative emotions like anger, depression, frustration and denial so that positive feelings can eventually take their place.
- Interested in increasing the amount and frequency of positive coping behaviors in your life and allowing you to engage in them with the supportive people you know.
- Setting yourself up for success later on because you will be able to accept you condition and flourish afterwards.

At this point, the choice is pretty clear. Positive coping is the only option for you. Remind yourself of this choice on days that seem to carry extra pain, worry or frustration. Negative coping always sounds appealing, but the risk of sliding in that direction is simply too great.

In some ways, making the choice of positive coping is a monumental task in itself. Now, your work changes into completing exercises that target your thoughts, feelings, behaviors, mental health and physical health in ways that encourage positivity.

Here's how.

### Seek out a Good Doctor

Comfort with your doctor is crucial. Consider what you are looking for in a doctor. Do you want a matter-of-fact delivery of information or someone that is more nurturing?

You will have a working relationship with this doctor for a while. Finding a good fit will build the trust needed to honestly communicate your fears and concerns.

If you do not trust your doctor, you will be less likely to follow his or her recommendations.

### Seek out Reliable Information

Information is everywhere online. Reading and reacting to the *wrong* information can lead to hopelessness and self-doubt. These feelings will trigger movement towards negative coping skills.

Steer clear from overly negative forums and online groups. This information will only make you expect the worse. Since each person's experience can be very different, set your eyes to the facts.

Talk to your doctor and get information from reputable sources. Statistics, data and research studies will provide the facts without bias.

### Get Physical

By now, it should go without saying, but it needs to be said anyways. Adjusting your diet, exercise and sleep patterns will be some of the best positive coping skills you can perform.

Do your best not to skim over this section thinking that you have heard it all before or that these changes do not work for you. No one is asking you to start eating only raw or gluten-free foods. No one expects you to run a marathon tomorrow or to have your circadian rhymes in perfect harmony.

The only goal is that you begin to see how foods, physical activity and sleep can be positive coping behaviors or

negative coping behaviors. In most cases, an objective eye can tell quickly what side of the fence you fall. Small changes over the course of a year can yield grand results.

*Next page: spiritual and mental coping strategies.*

**Get Spiritual**

When is the last time you prayed? When is the last time you went to church or spoke to a religious official? When is the last time that you felt connected to nature or the world around you?

Improving your spiritual health is crucial because after a medical diagnosis, people begin to question their higher power. You may be asking questions about your life and your death.

Knowing where you stand on issues of life and death make it easier to cope with today.

**Get Mental**

Working on your mental health specifically will give you the resources needed to cope as effectively as possible.

Any major transition in your life creates opportunity for unwanted feelings and past issues to present. Maybe the osteoarthritis diagnosis is not the main concern, but it is allowing old complications to affect you in the present.

A therapist is a great tool you should consider using to combat this problem. During sessions, your therapist can help you identify the feelings, situations, people and behaviors that are contributing to your symptoms while offering interventions that others have found helpful. Art therapy might also be something worth exploring.

Grief and loss is a major concern for people that are coping with a new medical condition. Therapists can guide you from shock to acceptance in a smoother manner than you can do alone.

**Add Connections**

A therapist is a great support to have in your life, but you need more. More supports will grant you varied experiences and more opportunities for fun.

Your diagnosis may have you feeling that fun is a thing of the past. Challenge that flawed notion to see that so much of the world is waiting for you.

Having fun is fine to do alone, but being with people you care about always boosts the benefit. Find people through coping groups or community activities. When you are looking for friends, anyone is fair game.

**Be Open**

This item is listed last, but it is probably the most important thing you can do to aid in your coping with osteoarthritis.

Being open means that you allow others to know and understand your mindset, your feelings and your thinking patterns. This means that you make yourself vulnerable to other people and the outside world.

Do not fear this risk, though. Being open means that other people will be better prepared to help you and that you will be better able to describe your situation and needs accurately.

**Conclusion**

Coping is not easy. Good coping takes time, but this good coping will lead to very positive results. The easy choice is rarely the best choice. By following the tips above, you'll be able to deal with what osteoarthritis and life sends your way.