



# Great Resources for Osteoarthritis Patients

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## Finding Information, Support and Therapy

People who take an interest in their disease management, and a proactive approach to their treatment, fare better than those who don't. In fact, there's a good deal of evidence that the more you learn about your OA, the less joint pain you will experience, the fewer doctor visits you will require, and the more you will enjoy your daily life.

The next step is applying your knowledge and drawing from the resources around you to improve your arthritis management – learn where to find the most helpful tools, support, and rehabilitation for a healthier, more comfortable life with OA.

### Online Resources

There's plenty of information online, but most people don't have the time or patience to comb through dozens of websites to find relevant and reputable information. Here are a few clear, comprehensive, and up-to-date resources to get you started:

#### The Arthritis Foundation

A great place to start learning more about OA, with a focus on living – and thriving – with the condition. You'll find lots of optimistic, proactive articles on how others are handling their arthritis, plus tools to help you manage your own. Take a look at the advocacy section and how to get involved in a conference, charity walk, or other opportunity to meet likeminded people and help spread awareness.

#### OAHealthInfo.com

A wonderfully thorough collection of helpful links to drug companies, fact sheets, journal articles and treatment articles. It's easy to navigate, and well-organized – you won't need to scroll through endless pages of info to get what you need.

#### Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Here you'll find everything from basic arthritis info to podcasts and up-to-date publications, all laid out in a clear homepage. Click through the Arthritis Spotlights section for useful reports, statistics, and tips to help you understand your arthritis better and in turn, treat your symptoms better.

*Next page: social and financial support.*

## Social and Financial Support

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Arthritis symptoms are chronic, and medication costs can be high. Along with the compromises and daily limitations your OA imposes, the strain can be almost unbearable without a helping hand. Luckily, there are several sources of support – both emotional and financial – to make life with arthritis easier:

### **Patient Assistance Programs**

A number of drug companies have programs in place to help patients afford their arthritis medication. In many cases, you can apply directly to the company, but some medications require your doctor to apply on your behalf.

Start by looking up your specific arthritis medications online (arthritis.org has a comprehensive list of drugs), and follow the links to explore the co-pay programs. Eligibility requirements can vary drastically from one drug to the next, but even if you don't qualify for the full benefits, you may be able to shave off some of your monthly costs

### **Local Support Groups**

A good social support network can relieve the effects of arthritis pain and reduce the risk of depression that can come with a chronic disease. Friends and family should be your first choice: studies reveal that patients who have compassionate contact with the people they know and trust do better overall.

But don't despair if your family network is lacking! Find a local support group to attend, or browse through the many online patient forums for OA patients like you – like the one here at NewLifeOutlook!

If you're having a hard time getting out of the house, you could arrange a nurse or occupational therapist to visit you every week – they'll have helpful tips and warm words to keep you on track.

### **Exercise Groups**

Look into your local hospital, physical therapy clinics or even community centers for exercise classes designed for OA patients. This is a great opportunity for you to socialize and get fit – both healthy activities on their own, but together they can bring incredible stress relief.

Talk to your doctor before joining up with any class, just to make sure it's a level of activity that your body can handle, and consider trying something you haven't done before. Most importantly, be sure you're comfortable in your surroundings; choosing a class geared specifically to chronic pain patients will promise an understanding and appropriately paced environment.

It's important to recognize the supportive resources around you, but you should also learn to lean on yourself. Start keeping a journal if you haven't already, including all of your frustrations, exercises, pain levels, and anything that made you feel better in mind and body. Writing about your pain and struggle can directly affect your healing.

*Next page: therapists who can help.*

### **Therapists Who Can Help**

Your family doctor and rheumatologist make up the foundation of your medical team, but there may be room for other allies in your OA care. Combining hands-on, psychological, and self-guided treatment with your prescribed medication could bring more relief than you might imagine. Consider visiting a new therapist to complement your current OA management program:

#### **Physiotherapist**

It's no secret that a good physiotherapist can make a huge difference in anyone's OA management. After all, they know the best movements to improve strength and flexibility, and can teach you how to do them safely.

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Regular physiotherapy is a must if you want to see improvement: you may need to begin with frequent visits, but will soon be able to integrate into your self-care at home. An occupational therapist is a different, but related, expert in movement and health; ask for a recommendation or referral from your doctor or physio.

### **Yoga Instructor**

Yoga gets more popular by the day, and for good reason: it's as good for the body as it is for the mind, plus it doesn't strain your joints and muscles like most aerobic exercise. Most people living with chronic pain can benefit from a regular yoga practice (especially when led by a trained instructor), but the postures are especially helpful for OA patients: a study published in the *Journal of Rheumatology* found that OA patients who practiced yoga had a noticeable improvement in pain, tenderness, and range of motion, especially in the hands and fingers.

### **Behavioral Therapist**

OA can seem like an entirely physical disorder, but it also brings very real emotional and psychological distress. Feelings of isolation are all too common, and they can spiral into depression, anxiety, and even more sensitivity to pain.

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) can help you understand where your pain stems from, what it's doing to your mind, and how to overcome it. For some patients, hypnosis or other psychodynamic interventions will get to the heart of the matter more effectively.

### **Nutritionist**

What you eat (and don't eat) will definitely play a role in how your body feels, your energy levels, and how your symptoms wear on you. Consider visiting a nutritionist to get on the right track: even if you consider yourself to be a fairly healthy eater, a small adjustment here and there can have remarkable effects. As you age, maintaining a healthy weight becomes more difficult, but it's vital to stay within the recommended range in order to avoid stressing your joints to the point of pain and injury.

There are dozens of alternative and complementary therapies out there, but it's not always clear if they're safe to try. For instance, chiropractic can help to relieve the pain and pressure around the joints throughout your body, but it isn't a good idea if there's any inflammation present. Acupuncture doesn't seem to have any clear benefits, but there's not much risk of side effects either, so many doctors are fine with it if that's something you want to try.

However, it's important to speak with your own doctor before adding any complementary therapy to your routine, because new activities or nutritional supplements could interfere with your current treatment more than you might imagine.