By Dr. Ramona Warren

Do you bounce out of bed in the morning, eager to start a new day? Unfortunately, for many over the age of 50, the typical morning starts with joint pain and stiffness in the form of arthritis.

According to the CDC, arthritis is the most common disability in America, affecting one out of five adults. Although typically thought to impact the elderly, nearly two-thirds of people with arthritis are younger than 65.

Arthritis is characterized by pain, swelling and stiffness in or around joints. There are over 100 different forms of arthritis and related diseases. The most common types include osteoarthritis (OA), rheumatoid arthritis (RA), psoriatic arthritis (PsA), lupus, fibromyalgia and gout. Many times patients are told there is “no known cause.”

Osteoarthritis (OA), also known as degenerative arthritis or degenerative joint disease, is the most common form of arthritis. In fact, over 70 percent of Americans over 50 suffer with some degree of osteoarthritis. In OA, the joint surface wears away due to inflammation. Inflamed cells release enzymes that eat away bone and cartilage. The cartilage provides a buffer or “cushion” between the bones and, when it breaks down, the bones rub and grind against each other. The knee, hip, hands and spine are the most common joints for osteoarthritis. OA can lead to limited range of motion and often to joint replacement.

Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA) is an autoimmune condition affecting 1.5 million Americans. It has been referred to as “crippling arthritis” since it may cause severe joint deformity, especially in the hands and feet. About 75 percent of RA cases affect women, and it typically occurs between the ages of 30-60 (men are more likely to acquire this disease later in life). According to many researchers, RA was non-existent before 1800, and there were no cases of RA found in Africa until 1957.

One of the most common choices for relieving arthritis symptoms is non-steroidal anti-inflammatories (NSAIDs) such as aspirin, Advil, Aleve, Motrin, Celebrex, Voltaire or Naproxen. However, there are risks with taking these medications. NSAIDs block the enzyme that protects the stomach lining, which can lead to ulcers, gastritis and gastrointestinal bleeding. NSAIDs also deplete sulfur levels in the body. Sulfur is important for detoxing hormones through the liver, as well as playing an important role in repairing cartilage. Low sulfur levels make it difficult for the body to heal the joint. Research also shows NSAIDs can cause a leukotriene reaction that creates more inflammation in the body than the original inflammatory reaction you were trying to fight! This reaction is common in people who take NSAIDs on a regular basis or take them before exercise to “prevent” pain.

When trying to improve arthritis pain, diet is a great place to start. Dr. John McDougall has been studying the effects of nutrition on disease for over 30 years and believes diet is the only hope for arthritis. His research has shown a change in diet can often stop inflammation. The increased consumption of highly-processed foods, especially sugar, has led to an increase in inflammation and degenerative changes. Getting back to a traditional diet of whole foods, which includes a variety of vegetables, fruits, lean meats, nuts and seeds, will help reduce inflammation and bring about pain relief for your joints.

Other natural remedies to help alleviate arthritis pain include:

* **Chiropractic care**. Chiropractic treatment can help reduce pain and ease joint stiffness by restoring joint mobility through gentle manipulation.
* **Physical Activity.** Research shows walking, bicycling, swimming and gentle weight training help strengthen muscles and provide greater support to the joints. People with arthritis should aim for 150 minutes of exercise a week. The Arthritis Foundation has a program called Walk With Ease that has been proven to reduce the arthritis pain. You can find more information at [arthritis.org](http://arthritis.org).
* **Weight Loss.** Being overweight increases your risk of arthritis and can exacerbate symptoms. Not only does additional weight stress joints, but fat cells actually produce inflammatory substances leading to increased pain and swelling in the joints. Even a nominal weight reduction of 10-20 pounds can make a difference.
* **Supplements**. Many supplements can reduce arthritis symptoms, especially when part of a whole body approach that incorporates diet, exercise, weight loss and rest. Helpful supplements include fish oil, vitamin D3, ginger, turmeric, boswellia (frankincense) and capsaicin. Be sure to check with your doctor to make sure there are no interactions with medications you may already be taking.
* **PEMF**. In December 2011, Dr. Oz had a show titled, "Revolutionary Cure for Pain." He stated, "I am more excited about the show today than any other show we have done this season, because today we are changing the practice of medicine." The show discussed how you can help chronic pain, including arthritis, without pills or surgery. This revolutionary cure he is so excited about is called Pulsed Electromagnetic Field Therapy (PEMF). PEMF therapy increases the cells’ electrical charge through pulsed electromagnetic frequencies and allows the cell to function properly, leading to reduced pain and improved function. PEMF therapy has been around for decades and is very common in Europe and Asia. A 2009 study by the National Institutes of Health said PEMF not only alleviates the pain and inflammation of arthritis, but can also help reduce the progression of arthritis. We have been using PEMF therapy at Pathways To Healing and have found it to be very effective for patients with joint pain and stiffness.

There are many other alternative approaches to help relieve the pain of arthritis, including acupuncture and massage. Take these natural steps to help improve the quality of your life and start waking up in the mornings with a renewed ability to “bounce out of bed,” eager to start your day!

*If you would like to have an anti-inflammatory diet emailed to you, or if you want more information on PEMF therapy, please email pathwaysth@gmail.com.*