



51 Ways to Be Good to Your Joints

Follow these simple steps to preserve joint health.

Avoid a pain in the neck. Document holders attached to computer monitors and positioned at eye-level, along with hands-free telephone headsets, can reduce neck strain.

Compute comfortably. Your upper body should be spaced 20 to 26 inches from your computer monitor, the top of which should be at an even line with the top of your head when your head is in neutral position. Your arms should hang comfortably at your sides, elbows at a right angle, with your wrists relaxed while typing.

Ditch the high heels. Unless you're a fashion model, chances are you can live without high heels. Experts say a three-inch heel stresses your foot seven times more than a one-inch heel. In addition, heels put extra stress on your knees and may increase your risk of developing osteoarthritis.

Sit and stand. Neither sitting nor standing on your feet all day is good for you. When possible, alternate between the two to prevent locking yourself in one position. If your job primarily involves sitting, take a break and stand up every 30 minutes or so.

Rest your wrists. Purchase a wrist rest for your computer or make your own with two strips of bubble-wrap packing material taped together. Make the bottom strip wider than the top one, and tape the excess width to the bottom of your keyboard so the wrist rest extends outward.

Handle heavy loads. To make heavy loads easier to handle, use your largest, strongest joints and muscles to take stress off smaller hand joints and to spread the load over large surface areas. When you lift or carry items, use the palms of both hands or use your arms instead of your hands. Hold items close to your body, which is less stressful for your joints. For joint safety, slide objects whenever possible rather than lift them.

Resolve to reduce. Lose weight. You won't just look better – you'll feel better, too. Every extra pound you gain puts four times the stress on your knees. The flip side is that even a small amount of weight loss will give your knees relief. Research has shown that losing as little as 11 pounds may improve your joint health and cut your risk of osteoarthritis of the knee by 50 percent.

Picture portion sizes. Eating proper portions is key to losing and maintaining a healthy weight and, in turn, lightening the load on your joints. Brush up on proper portion sizes and picture visual comparisons. For instance: One serving of meat – 3 ounces – is the size of the palm of your hand; one serving of dairy – say 2 ounces of cheese – is the size of a pair of dominoes; one serving of vegetables – 1 cup – is the size of your fist.

Turn off the tube. Television not only keeps you sedentary, which slows your metabolism, it also makes you prone to overeating. Read a good book instead, or better yet, pop on those cross trainers and hit the road.

Build strong bones. Boost your calcium intake, because a diet rich in this important mineral helps to keep your bones sturdy and can lower your risk of osteoporosis (the brittle bone disease). There are plenty of sources besides milk, including yogurt, broccoli, kale, figs, salmon and calcium supplements.

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Ditch the drive thru. Avoid eating at fast food restaurants. But if you must, try to make the healthiest choices. Opt for grilled meat instead of fried meat. Add lettuce and tomato to your sandwich. Hold the mayo. Substitute a side salad for french fries. Drink water or juice instead of soft drinks.

Pick, pour or peel. If you are looking for a tasty treat, reach for an orange – or a tall glass of orange juice. Why? Recent research points to the importance of vitamin C and other antioxidants in reducing your risk of osteoarthritis.

Add color to your diet. Choose fruits and veggies in a wide range of color to get maximum nutrients, such as fiber, disease-fighting antioxidants and an abundance of phytochemicals.

Hang out at the bar. Eating the veggies typically found in a plain tossed salad from a salad bar – romaine and Bibb lettuces, broccoli, spinach, kale or parsley – can lessen the amount of bone loss that occurs with age, research says, thanks to their high calcium count. But remember to go easy on the dressing.

Be supplement savvy. Glucosamine, a supplement made from the shells of crab, lobster and shrimp, has been shown to ease joint pain and stiffness, particularly in people with osteoarthritis of the knee. Some studies suggest that it may contribute to cartilage repair.

Throw some fish on the grill. Omega-3 fatty acids, found in cold-water fish, such as salmon and mackerel, can help keep your joints healthy. In fact, studies show omega-3s can reduce the pain and inflammation of stiff joints in people with arthritis. Because you probably don't have time to grill fish every night, consider supplementing your diet with fish oil capsules.

Sneak in healthy food. Keep pre-cut veggies and fruits – like celery and carrot sticks, broccoli florets, pepper slices and melon cubes – in the front door of your refrigerator so you'll reach for them at snack time.

Keep a food journal. Increase the odds that you'll stick to your plan for eating better by putting your nutritional goals in writing. Record what you eat daily to keep track of your progress.

Break it up. Instead of eating two or three big meals each day, try spreading out your munching into a number of smaller meals throughout the day. Research shows that grazing throughout the day boosts your metabolism, helping your body run more efficiently (and keeping the pounds off).

Curtail your caffeine intake. While you may need that extra burst of energy in the morning, try and resist those second and third cups of coffee. Studies show that the extra caffeine can weaken your bones.

Take your vitamins. Supplementing your diet with a multivitamin is a good way to get the vitamins and minerals you may lack by eating too much junk food. Strong bodies (and overall joint health) will benefit from bone-building calcium and vitamin K, tissue-repairing vitamin C, pain-relieving vitamin E, folic acid and more.

Visit the great outdoors. Besides the soothing, relaxing benefits of breathing fresh air and observing nature, the great outdoors provides many opportunities for burning extra calories while having fun. Gardening and other yard work is just one way to firm up your arms and legs, while being productive, too.

Take the plunge. From strength training to jogging to aerobic classes (and let's not forget the plain old swim), aquatic exercises allow you to keep doing many of the exercises you love, while taking a load off your joints.

Take a hike. Choose your favorite spots and walk them at least once a week. Hiking burns calories, strengthens muscles and builds denser bones, while providing interesting scenery and a chance to get in touch with Mother Nature.

Warm up. Don't think about hitting the gym, the pool or the trails (or any exercise for that matter) before warming up.

Warming up your body before exercise is like warming your car up in the winter. To keep it running smoothly and for optimal joint safety, start slowly and get up to speed only after your muscles and joints have at least five minutes prep time.

Go for function not fashion. Shoes shouldn't just look good, they should work well, too. Look for flexible, supportive shoes that are squared or rounded at the toe so your toes can move around. A shoe with a rubber sole will give you more cushion. Make sure your shoe is flexible at the ball of your foot, where you push off.

Check in with yourself. Monitor how you're feeling after exercise. Joints still aching two hours after your workout are telling you something. Listen to them and lighten your routine next time.

Sttttrreettccchhh. Stretching isn't just for workouts anymore. Take breaks throughout the day, including at your office, to get re-energized and help keep your muscles and ligaments flexible and strong.

See a yogi. Yoga hasn't been the hottest trend (for the last 5,000 years) for nothing. Yoga and other forms of gentle exercise like Pilates and Tai Chi strengthen the mind-body connection, allowing you to get your body fit while you get your mind in shape. These exercises keep joints strong and muscles limber while erasing stress.

Bulk up. Strength training is the best way to boost your metabolism (and get a sleeker bod, too). Research also shows lifting weights creates denser bones and builds stronger muscles that help stabilize and protect joints.

Develop abs of steel. Strong abs are essential to creating overall core strength and balance. Studies show that improving strength and balance are key to preventing falls and protecting joints from damage.

Walk Fido. Pets don't just help your mental health, they also help your physical health. Walking your dog is a great excuse for getting yourself into shape. Use a sturdy leash that is easy to grip, such as a thick leash with a loop handle.

Brace yourself. Elbow, wrist and joint braces, or guards, not only prevent injury but also reduce the load on joints. Ask your doctor if braces may alleviate some of your joint stress and, who knows, perhaps improve your game.

Get a trainer. Sign up for a consultation with a trainer who can help show you the right way to exercise to prevent injury and avoid undue joint stress. Doing an exercise wrong is often worse than not exercising at all. Think joint safety!

Don't stomp your feet. Research shows pounding exercises like kickboxing, step aerobics and more can be tough on joints. Switch to low-impact activities like biking and swimming that offer the same calorie-burning benefits without the painful pounding.

Buddy up. Working out with friends is one of the easiest ways to keep your exercise program on track. Try walking with a friend after work.

Increase your range. Range-of-motion exercises (such as stretching) are a good way to keep your muscles and ligaments flexible and strong. Add weights to your workout and you'll tone up, too.

Soak it up. There's nothing like a warm bath to soothe aching muscles and joints after a workout. So go ahead and pamper yourself without guilt – how you treat yourself after exercise is as critical as how you treat yourself during a workout.

Do the write thing. Keeping a journal can be fun and therapeutic. Writing about your deepest fears, feelings and frustrations can help you put everything in perspective. It also helps you easily look back over your victories and successes. Some people with pain have found a measure of relief from writing down their feelings.

Enjoy a massage. Massage can relieve muscle tension and help reduce fatigue. Invest in a professional massage or research information on do-it-yourself tips. Go ahead and treat yourself to a soothing massage after a busy period at work or stressful time. Certain forms of massage, such as Swedish, focus on muscles and joints to improve function.

Let yourself go. On vacation, that is. Find time to take a break away from your routine – even if you are a stay-at-home mom or you work from home. Don't get caught up in trying to plan an expensive weeklong trip to an island, either. A day or two off to enjoy your favorite activity counts as vacation, too. Experts continue to emphasize the connection between stress and pain.

Say no. It may be tough at first, but after awhile you'll get the hang of it. Saying no to others and to activities lets you say yes to extra time for yourself. It also allows you to say yes to exercise, healthy eating and stress reduction – three power-packed methods of improving your health.

Sit, soak and soothe. A warm bath before bed can relieve muscle tension, ease aching joints and help you get a good night's sleep.

Pack some heat. To relieve pain and stiffness, try heat therapies, such as heated pools, whirlpools, warm showers, warm compresses or microwaveable heat packs.

Chill out. Applying cold to sore spots can also help reduce pain and swelling. Use a cold pack, a bag of ice wrapped in a towel or a bag of frozen vegetables for a quick and easy cold treatment. You can also try an "ice massage" and rub ice directly on a painful joint.

Rub out pain. If you have mild pain, you may find a topical analgesic, such as capsaicin, counter-irritants or salicylates, helpful.

Make a date with your doctor. See your physician for a routine check-up at least once a year. Request an examination of your joints – from head to toe – and ask for tips on protecting your joints from daily wear and tear. It's never too soon to learn self-management techniques.

Fess up. Be sure to tell your doctor about medications you are taking, both prescription and over the counter. Don't forget to mention any nutritional supplements you're taking, too. All medications – even natural ones – have the potential to cause side effects or to react adversely with each other.

Tell your doctor about joint pain. Take the Arthritis Foundation joint health quiz. If you have signs of arthritis, see your doctor to get a full exam and diagnosis.

Play 20 questions. Well, maybe not 20, but write down questions related to your health as you think of them. Prioritize them and slip them into your purse or wallet before your next doctor's visit. That way, you'll have your top concerns at your fingertips.

Kick butt. People who smoke have a greater risk of fracture than nonsmokers. In fact, smoking can reduce bone mass, which can lead to osteoporosis. Kick the habit to keep your body strong and healthy. Plus, just think of all the money you'll save by going smoke-free.

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