



**IN THIS ISSUE**

**Easing the pain of hand arthritis**  
—cover

**Take chronic anxiety seriously**  
—cover

**From the Editor: Stay warm this Winter**  
—p2

**Health benefits of whole grains**  
—p3

**What medication guides can tell you**  
—p5

**Tips to tackle dry eyes**  
—p7

**Ask the experts**  
—p8

**Newsbriefs...**Diabetic? Schedule exercise to help regulate your blood sugar levels—pg. 3

## Coping With Arthritis in Your Hands

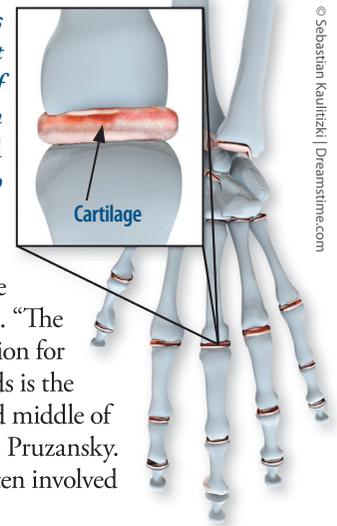
There are things you can do to ease pain and preserve range-of-motion

Arthritis can affect any joint in the body, but it is often most noticeable when it affects the hands. While it can be painful and functionally limiting, self-help strategies and medication can help ease the symptoms.

**OA or RA?** The most common type of arthritis in seniors is osteoarthritis (OA), in which the cartilage that cushions the ends of the bones in a joint wears away, leaving the bones to rub against each other. “When OA develops in the hands, it tends to affect the base of the thumbs, where the thumb and wrist join, and the knuckles at the end of the fingers,” says Mark E. Pruzansky, MD, assistant professor of orthopaedics at Mount Sinai.

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is less common. More likely to affect women, it is a disorder of the immune system that causes the synovium (the tissue that lines joints) to become inflamed. This

*Arthritis damages the cartilage that cushions the ends of bones. Inflammation is a factor in RA (pictured), and also may occur with OA.*



© Sebastian Kaulitzki | Dreamstime.com

process eventually destroys the cartilage in the affected joints. “The most common location for RA pain in the hands is the joints at the base and middle of the fingers,” says Dr. Pruzansky. “The wrist is also often involved with RA.”

OA symptoms tend to worsen as the day goes on. With RA, symptoms are typically worse in the morning—for example, you may experience stiffness in your hands for about 30 minutes to several hours after waking. As well as stiffness, swelling, and pain, hand arthritis may cause bumps to form around the joints. In addition, it can affect your grip strength, making tasks like opening jars and turning keys extremely difficult.

*Continued on page 6*

## Seek Help if You Suffer From Chronic Anxiety

Excessive worrying can increase your risk for other serious health problems

Up to 14 percent of American seniors are thought to suffer from anxiety according to the National Council on Aging. Many more have an undiagnosed anxiety disorder. “Older adults are at risk for anxiety because they face many challenges, including poor health, loss, and decreasing social support,” says Judith Neugroschl, MD, assistant professor of psychiatry at Mount Sinai. “Some medications also can raise the risk for anxiety.”

It’s normal to worry about issues such as health and finances—to a degree. But if your life is disrupted by excessive worry that goes untreated, you may face serious consequences. “Anxiety

disorders can affect your quality of life, precipitate social withdrawal, interfere with self-care, and exacerbate health problems,” Dr. Neugroschl confirms. “Anxiety disorders also may occur with physical disorders such as heart disease and lung diseases, and with mood disorders like depression.”

Anxiety can be managed with psychotherapy and medications—a 2016 study also suggests that yoga may help.

**How Anxiety Disorders Manifest**

Common anxiety disorders include:

- **Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD)** This affects about 6.5 million Americans, according to the Anxiety and

Depression Association of America, and it is thought to be the most common anxiety disorder in older adults. It often is associated with a traumatic event, such as a fall or serious illness. GAD symptoms include feelings of worry or tension on most days for a period of six months or more. Physical symptoms, such as headaches, fatigue, nausea, muscle aches, and sweating, can accompany the anxiety. People with GAD also may have difficulty concentrating and sleeping, and GAD is often associated with depression.

- **Panic attacks** These are characterized by symptoms such as heart palpitations, dizziness, nausea, chest pain, and

*Continued on page 4*

## BONES & JOINTS

### ARTHRITIS *cont. from p1*

**Self-Help Treatments** Simple self-help strategies for easing the discomfort of arthritis include ice and heat packs. Many arthritis sufferers also report relief from complementary approaches like acupuncture. But Dr. Pruzansky recommends that you tread carefully when it comes to dietary and/or herbal supplements that claim to help ease arthritis pain. “These are not regulated by the Food and Drug Administration, and may reduce the effectiveness of, and interact with, conventional drugs,” he says. “For example, herbal supplements can decrease the effectiveness of RA drugs.” Bleeding is another concern, since many people with arthritis take nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), which increase the risk for bleeding, and some supplements affect the blood’s ability to clot. Many older adults also take blood thinners like warfarin (Coumadin®), which shouldn’t be taken alongside supplements that have a similar effect. “If you’re considering using supplements, be sure to discuss their safety and efficacy with your doctor or pharmacist,” Dr. Pruzansky advises.

Other options for easing the discomfort of arthritis in the hands include splints. Worn overnight, they immobilize the joint so that the bones don’t rub together. You also may be referred to an occupational therapist, who can prescribe exercises that will improve pain and flexibility while not aggravating your arthritis. “An occupational therapist also can analyze how you tend to use your hands, and give specific advice on ways to reduce stress and increase stamina in weakened joints,” Dr. Pruzansky adds.

**Medication** Pain-relieving drugs that can be used to help manage arthritis symptoms include over-the-counter (OTC) acetaminophen (Tylenol®), which many arthritis sufferers find effective. If you don’t gain relief from acetaminophen, NSAIDs may be an option. Since NSAIDs are associated with a greater risk for side effects—including bleeding, high blood pressure, kidney damage, heart attack, and heart failure—your doctor will likely advise that you initially try a topical NSAID such as diclofenac sodium

### WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

- ◆ **Osteoarthritis (OA)** typically develops due to “wear and tear” that results in a loss of joint cartilage, the rubbery material covering the ends of the bones.
- ◆ **Rheumatoid arthritis (RA)** is caused by a faulty immune system that attacks the synovium (the tissue that lines joints).

(Voltaren® Gel). If you need to take oral NSAIDs, such as ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®) and naproxen (Aleve®), carefully follow the dosage instructions. “Low doses are usually sufficient, but stronger NSAIDs may be prescribed if necessary,” Dr. Pruzansky notes. “Treat these drugs with caution even if you’re taking OTC versions, due to the possible side effects.”

Opioids are more powerful pain medications that may be prescribed for short-term use if NSAIDs are ineffective. However, they carry a risk of addiction and dependence—moreover, recent research (*Osteoarthritis and Cartilage*, June 2016) suggested they are no more effective than NSAIDs.

Other medications that may be used to decrease the pain of RA include steroids and disease-modifying antirheumatic drugs (DMARDs) like methotrexate (Otrexup®, Rasuvo®), which slow the course of RA. Biologic drugs are an option for severe RA that doesn’t respond to NSAIDs or DMARDs—options include etanercept (Enbrel®, Infliximab, Remicade®), and adalimumab (Humira®). “Since these drugs work by suppressing the immune system, they can lower your resistance to infections,” Dr. Pruzansky cautions. “You’ll likely be advised to get the shingles vaccine prior to taking biologics.”

If these first-line treatments do not work, cortisone injections into the joint may provide relief for several months or more. “Cortisone cannot be used too often, however, as it can weaken tissue,” says Dr. Pruzansky. “The good news is that cortisone basically stays where it is, meaning that it minimally enters the system and usually doesn’t cause other side effects—but this also means that repeated treatment at the same joint should be limited, to avoid tissue damage.” 

### Exercises to Ease Pain and Improve Range-of-Motion

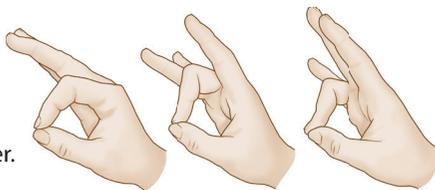
#### FINGER EXTENSION



Place your palm flat on the table. Then raise and lower each finger, one by one. Repeat 10 times.

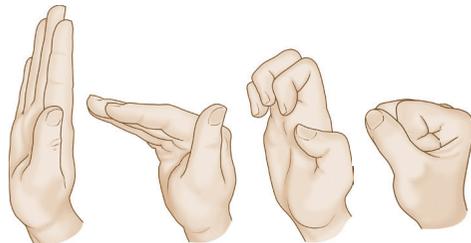
#### THUMB OPPOSITION

Make an “O” by touching your thumb to each fingertip, one at a time. Do this 10 times with each finger.



#### TENDON GLIDE

Start with fingers together and your hand pointing straight up. Bend your fingers at the knuckles, pointing them forward and keeping them straight while your thumb still points upward. Hold for 5 seconds.



Next, bend your thumb across your palm and bend your fingers at their midpoint, making a claw. Hold for 5 seconds. Finally, bend all your finger joints, drawing them into a full fist. Repeat this series 10 times with each hand.

Illustrations: Alayna Paquette