Care Giving and Arthritis

A Little Background Information…

- *What is arthritis?*
  - Arthritis is a form of joint disorder that involves inflammation of one or more joints. There are more than 100 types of arthritis and two of the most common are osteoarthritis (OA) and rheumatoid arthritis (RA). OA is the breakdown of the cartilage that cushions the joints to allow easy movement. The bone on bone rubbing that occurs as a result can cause stiffness and pain that makes it difficult to use that joint. RA, on the other hand, is an autoimmune disease where the immune system attacks the thin membrane that lines the joints. As a result of these attacks, fluid builds up in the joints and causes pain and inflammation.
- *Who has arthritis?*
  - Arthritis is most common among adults who are 65 and older. However, people of all ages can be diagnosed with arthritis. It also can affect members of all racial and ethnic groups. Arthritis is more common in women and among adults who are obese.

What to Do After a Diagnosis…

- *How to Take Care of Family Members with Arthritis*
  - Caring for a parent or loved one suffering from arthritis is a huge responsibility. You may be expected to help care for a person with arthritis, and you may be unfamiliar with their symptoms and the condition. The [Arthritis Foundation](#) website is an excellent resource that covers all of the basics of caring for your parent or loved one.
- *Young Caregivers*
  - At times, the child of a person diagnosed with arthritis becomes their main caregiver. It is very important to keep in mind that these caregivers still be treated age appropriately. Some ways to do this include:
    - Keep things "normal". Make sure they still have experiences outside of caregiving.
    - Watch for signs of stress, such as headaches, backaches and the inability to sleep or eat. Developing a support network with other adults can help ease the young caregiver's burden.

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- Consider their duties as standard household chores. Present chores as things that all family members do for each other to contribute, not because one member has too much pain to do them.
- Choose their tasks wisely. Try to avoid making them uncomfortable by giving them age-appropriate duties.

- *College-age Caregivers*
  - The biggest problem that many young adult caregivers face is that they no longer live at home, making it more difficult to be there for their parent. Here are a few important things to remember about long-distance care:
    - Don't feel guilty.
    - Ask for help when you need it.
    - Arrange an initial "fact-finding" trip to learn more about their diagnosis.
    - Consider the possible needs your parent will have.
    - Get organized.
    - Identify your parent's support group.
    - Get familiar with your parent's community resources.
    - Plan trips so you can gdYbXHa Yk]H your parent.
    - Consider your obligations. Take time for yourself.

- *Adult Caregivers*
  - Adult caregivers will oftentimes have to deal with the unique situations of either having to care for a parent while starting their own family or having a spouse with a chronic illness. If a parent has arthritis, the coping tips for an adult caregiver are gJa]`Uf1c`H\cgY cZcollege-age caregivers. Caring for a spouse, however, can dfYgYbh its own set of challenges. Ways to cope with this include:
    - Allow your spouse to express their frustration.
    - Try to keep the relationship as balanced as possible. A sick spouse should not become a "patient" and the caregiver should not be treated as a "nurse".
    - Have a good support network to help you deal with the physical, emotional, and financial issues that are possible.
    - Take care of yourself. Don't prioritize your spouse's k Y`!VY]b[significantly above your own.

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Thinking Ahead…

- *Are You at Risk for Arthritis?*
  - Risk factors for arthritis include:
    - Family History
    - Age
    - Sex
    - Previous joint injury
    - Obesity
- *Ways to Prevent an Arthritis Diagnosis if You're at Risk*
  - Lose weight or keep weight down
  - Do exercise that doesn't damage joints, such as:
    - Low-impact biking
    - Swimming
    - Yoga and Pilates
    - Walking
    - Weightlifting
  - Watch your biomechanics
    - Á‶6]ca YWLb]Vÿmeans using proper posture, tools, and h YWb]ei Yg during any physical tasks
  - Prevent and treat injuries
  - ÁTake supplements (a combination of omega-3 and glucosamine has be found to be effective Zcf Uh`f]h]g dfYj Ybh]cb)

Local Resources

- The Missouri Arthritis and Osteoporosis Program ([MAOP](#)) is dedicated to providing resources to anyone that has to deal with chronic diseases on a daily basis. An [online toolkit](#) is available that provides educational material about living with a chronic condition as well as resources for caregivers.
- There are seven Regional Arthritis Centers (RACs) throughout the state of Missouri. Each RAC offers classes that focus on different aspects of living with a chronic disease, including d\ng]WU` UWj ]hm programs ftailored for dYcd`Y with arthritisŁand chronic disease self-management courses.

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