Assisting a Client with Arthritis

Build Trust  Take the Lead  Share your Heart®

CAREGiver Guide

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Home Instead, Inc. acknowledges with appreciation the content provided by The Arthritis Foundation, Inc. which has been incorporated into this training.
A CAREGiver’s Guide to Arthritis

When you are providing care to your client with arthritis, it's very important that you understand the type of arthritis he or she has and how it can affect daily life. This information will enable you to better understand the type of assistance you can provide. For many people with arthritis, pain is constant. If this pain is coupled with joint damage, your client may not be able to do even simple, everyday tasks most of us take for granted. But with proper treatment and pain and self-management, these limitations can be minimized. The more you know about your client’s arthritis, how it’s managed, and the needs that arise from it, the better prepared you will be to offer understanding and effective care.

The goal of this guide is to help you learn how arthritis may affect your client and how you can provide the best care and assistance possible.

Learning Objectives

At the end of this class, you will be able to:
1. List three different types of arthritis and the symptoms for each.
2. List ways you can support your clients who have arthritis.

Arthritis

Arthritis is an umbrella term for conditions that affect the joints - the place where two or more bones meet to allow movement. In some types of arthritis, other parts of the body, like organs, eyes and skin, may also be affected.

There are nearly 100 different types of arthritis affecting roughly 50 million people in the United States. These conditions commonly impact mobility - the ability to move freely without pain - and can also limit a person’s ability to do everyday tasks, such as brushing hair, buttoning a coat, walking to the mailbox or opening the refrigerator door.

It is important that you know the type of arthritis your client has so you can understand how you can best provide support.

Two of the most common forms are osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis.
Osteoarthritis

Osteoarthritis (OA) is the most common form of arthritis; it affects approximately 27 million Americans today. Although OA was long considered a disease of wear and tear that comes with aging, researchers now know that much more is involved in the development of the condition, including chemical changes resulting in deterioration of bone and cartilage, and inflammation in the joint lining. Osteoarthritis most commonly affects the joints we use most: the hands, spine, hips and knees.

Signs and symptoms

Symptoms of osteoarthritis can include pain and stiffness in the affected joints, particularly after periods of rest or exercise or when weight or pressure is put on the joints. Morning stiffness can ease with gentle movement, usually within 30 minutes, but over time, the pain and stiffness may increase, even interfering with sleep. The joints may feel like they are rubbing together and can make a crackling sound. Although osteoarthritis can affect both sides of the body, often only one joint is affected – the left knee or right hip, for example – or one joint is more severely affected than others.

Although the joint damage of OA can be seen on x-ray, often these findings do not reflect the client’s symptoms. For example, some x-rays can show a joint riddled with osteoarthritis but the person may have few symptoms, while other clients may have severe symptoms with little evidence of joint damage on x-ray.

Risk factors

Osteoarthritis occurs in all races and backgrounds. It usually appears after age 45. Men under age 55 are more likely to have OA than women in the same age range. After age 55, however, women are more commonly affected. In the long run, more women experience osteoarthritis than men. One possible reason - women’s broader hips may put more long-term stress on the knees.

Treatment

Treatment for osteoarthritis is designed to relieve symptoms and improve function, including:

- medications to relieve pain
- exercises to strengthen muscles that support the joints and improve flexibility
- weight loss, if needed
- non-medication treatments, such as:
  - bracing or splinting damaged joints
  - hot or cold therapy
  - shoe inserts or special footwear
  - walking aids to relieve stress on painful joints.
- In some cases, surgery may be required to replace the damaged joint with prosthesis.
Rheumatoid Arthritis

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is a chronic inflammatory disease that can cause pain, swelling, stiffness and sometimes deformity of the joints. It occurs when the immune system attacks the membrane lining the joints.

**Signs and symptoms**

Symptoms of RA can include:

- joint pain and stiffness that can last for hours, especially in the morning
- fatigue
- low-grade fever
- loss of appetite.

People with severe RA can also develop lumps, called rheumatoid nodules, under the skin near affected joints. Unlike osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis generally occurs in a symmetrical pattern. This means that if one wrist or knee is affected, the other one is also.

**Risk factors**

Rheumatoid arthritis mainly affects women – about two to three times as many women as men have the disease. It typically begins in women between the ages of 30 and 60; it often occurs later in life in men.

**Treatment**

Treatment for rheumatoid arthritis focuses on:

- relieving pain and inflammation;
- improving joint function
- preventing or stopping joint damage
- in some cases, surgically replacing damaged joints.

Thanks to recent developments in the medication treatment of rheumatoid arthritis, irreparable joint damage and disability is less common than it once was. For most people, RA can be well controlled.
Other Forms of Arthritis

Although this is far from an exhaustive list, other relatively common forms of arthritis and related conditions include:

- Fibromyalgia
- Gout
- Osteoporosis
- Ankylosing spondylitis
- Lupus
- Polymyalgia rheumatic
- Polymyositis
- Psoriatic arthritis
- Sjögren’s syndrome

Fibromyalgia

Fibromyalgia is a condition characterized by widespread muscle pain, joint tenderness and pain when pressure is applied to specific points on the body.

Signs and symptoms
Common symptoms of fibromyalgia may include:
- muscle pain; for some, the pain can be debilitating
- fatigue
- difficulty sleeping and sleep disturbances
- headaches
- cognitive and memory problems often referred to as “fibro fog.”

People with fibromyalgia commonly suffer from related problems, including:
- anxiety
- depression
- restless leg syndrome – a neurologic disorder characterized by an irresistible urge to move the legs to stop uncomfortable sensations, especially at night
- irritable bowel syndrome – a common disorder of the large intestine characterized by abdominal pain and cramping, bloating, gas, diarrhea and/or constipation.

Risk factors
Approximately 90 percent of people with fibromyalgia are women; however, men and children can also get the condition. It is most commonly diagnosed in middle age and occurs more frequently in people who have other forms of arthritis and related conditions, such as rheumatoid arthritis or lupus.

Treatment
Treatment for fibromyalgia focuses on relieving pain, fatigue, and related problems; and improving sleep quality. Treatment often includes medication, exercise, and cognitive-behavioral therapy - a type of psychological treatment that helps people understand the thoughts and feelings that influence their behaviors.
Gout is a condition that occurs when uric acid accumulates in the blood and seeps out into the tissues, forming crystals that can cause acute pain, inflammation and loss of appetite.

**Signs and Symptoms**
For many people, the first symptom of gout is an extremely painful and swollen big toe, called podagra; however, gout can also attack the ankles, heels, knees, wrists, fingers and elbows. Attacks can last anywhere from a few days to several weeks. In some people, uric acid forms chalky lumps, called tophi, under the skin near the joints or around the rims of the ears. Uric acid crystals can also accumulate in the kidneys, leading to kidney stones.

**Risk factors**
Gout occurs in approximately 4 percent of American adults. Men in their 40s and 50s are most likely to develop gout, but by age 60, gout affects men and women equally. After age 80, more women than men have gout. It is more likely to occur in people who have a family member with the disease. Other risk factors for gout include:

- taking diuretic medications (“water pills”) or drugs that suppress the immune system
- having high cholesterol, high blood pressure, diabetes and/or heart disease
- eating red meat and shellfish
- being obese
- having undergone gastric bypass surgery
- drinking alcohol or sweet sodas.

**Treatment**
Treatment for gout is targeted at easing pain and inflammation of acute attacks and lowering uric acid levels to prevent or lessen the severity of further attacks. Most people with gout require medication. A treatment plan may also include:

- weight loss
- limiting alcohol
- avoiding or limiting foods that are high in purines - compounds that are found in particularly high concentrations high-protein foods, such as organ meats, mackerel, herring, sardines, and mussels.
Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis is one of the most common arthritis-related diseases. It is characterized by thin brittle bones that are prone to fracture.

Signs and Symptoms
Osteoporosis is often considered a silent disease. People usually have no symptoms until they suffer a painful bone fracture. Common fracture sites include the hip, wrist, and vertebrae. Over time, tiny fractures of the vertebrae lead to rounded shoulders, loss of height and kyphosis - an exaggerated rounding of the upper back sometimes referred to as hunchback or dowager’s hump.

Risk factors
Osteoporosis most commonly affects women after menopause, when levels of the bone-preserving female hormone estrogen diminish. Osteoporosis affects men less commonly than women. The disease can also occur in people of all ages who take corticosteroid medications to control inflammation.

Treatment
Treatment for osteoporosis involves:
- taking medications to build bone or slow bone loss
- taking calcium and vitamin D supplements
- eating a healthy diet
- performing weight-bearing exercises.

Ankylosing spondylitis

Ankylosing spondylitis is a type of arthritis that affects the spine, causing inflammation between the vertebrae and the joints between the spine and pelvis. Initial symptoms may include back pain and stiffness. If not controlled, inflammation can cause the spine to fuse and become rigid. Ankylosing spondylitis is more common in men than women and often affects men more severely. Treatment includes:
- taking medication to relieve symptoms and control inflammation
- exercising to help keep the spine mobile.

Lupus

Lupus is an autoimmune disease in which the immune system turns against parts of the body it is designed to protect, leading to inflammation and tissue damage. Lupus can affect many parts of the body, including the joints, skin, kidneys, lungs, heart, blood vessels, and brain. Common symptoms include:
- debilitating fatigue
- joint pain
- fevers
- skin rashes.
In most people, the disease tends to come and go, with times of inactive disease punctuated by flares or periods of illness.

Lupus affects up to nine times as many women as men. It is two to three times more common in African-American women than in Caucasian women and is also more common in women of Hispanic, Asian and Native American descent. African-American and Hispanic women are also more likely to have active disease and serious organ system involvement. Treatment focuses on controlling the damaging inflammation and managing problems associated with the disease.

**Polymyalgia rheumatica**

Polymyalgia rheumatica is a condition characterized by muscle pain and stiffness in the neck, shoulders and hips. It may also result in fever, weakness and weight loss. Treatment involves using corticosteroid medications to treat inflammation. For most people, the condition resolves completely in a year or two.

**Polymyositis**

Polymyositis is a chronic inflammatory disease of the skeletal muscles – particularly those closest to the trunk (hips, thighs, shoulders, arms and back). Symptoms often come on gradually and include:

- muscle weakness
- fatigue
- shortness of breath
- difficulty swallowing and speaking.

Polymyositis can occur at any age, but it most commonly affects people in their 30s through 50s. Treatment includes:

- medication to reduce inflammation and control the disease process
- physical therapy to improve muscle strength.

**Psoriatic arthritis**

Psoriatic arthritis is a form of arthritis that occurs in conjunction with the scaling skin disease, psoriasis. The arthritis usually develops after the skin disease, but in some people, arthritis begins first. Symptoms can include:

- red patches of skin with slivery scales
- joint pain, swelling and stiffness, which may come and go.

Treatment is targeted at controlling the skin disease and joint symptoms and preventing joint damage.
Sjögren’s syndrome

Sjögren’s syndrome is a condition in which the body’s immune system damages the moisture-producing glands – mainly the salivary glands and tear ducts. The main symptoms of Sjögren’s syndrome are:
- eyes that feel dry and gritty
- dry mouth, making it difficult to speak or swallow.

Other symptoms may include:
- joint pain and stiffness
- swollen salivary glands
- dry skin
- vaginal dryness
- fatigue.

Like many other autoimmune diseases, Sjögren’s syndrome affects more women than men. Treatment focuses largely on relieving symptoms.
### Activity

**Match the definition to the type of arthritis**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
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9. _____ Polymyositis
10. _____ Psoriatic arthritis
11. _____ Sjögren’s syndrome
Who Treats Arthritis?

A client with arthritis may be seen by a number of health professionals to treat and manage her condition.

Doctors and health care professionals on a patient’s team may include the following:

- **Rheumatologist** - a specialist with advanced training in arthritis and related conditions of the musculoskeletal system. In most cases, a rheumatologist is the main doctor who treats arthritis.

- **Orthopedic surgeon** - Specializes in diagnosing and treating problems of the musculoskeletal system, including arthritis and injuries.

- **Physiatrist** – A physician with specialized training in physical medicine and rehabilitation; may oversee a patient’s physical therapy program.

- **Podiatrist** - Doctors with special training to diagnose and treat foot problems, such as bunions and hammer toes.

- **Occupational therapist** - Health care professionals trained to help patients reach their highest level of independence in daily activities.

- **Physical therapist** – Health professionals trained and licensed in rehabilitation techniques; can help restore function and prevent disability for people affected by arthritis.

- **Psychologist** – Mental health professionals with specialized education and training in behavior, human psychology, therapeutic methods and therapeutic counseling.

- **Social worker** - Licensed to help individuals handle the impact of chronic illness; can involve helping people connect with social services and other types of assistance. Social workers may also provide counseling and help find solutions to social and financial problems related to arthritis.
Managing Pain

Pain is a common symptom to almost all forms of arthritis and related conditions. Easing pain is a primary goal of medical treatment.

Medications

Many people with arthritis require medication to control their disease or relieve its symptoms. There are many types of medications used in the treatment of arthritis and related conditions. Some are used to reduce pain, while others tackle inflammation. Prescription and over-the-counter medications can be used.

Other Options

Medications alone often fail to completely relieve the pain. Fortunately, there are many other pain-relief methods that people with arthritis find helpful, including:

- hot and cold treatments
- massage
- meditation
- acupuncture
- nutritional supplements.

Note: The responsibility of a CAREGiver is to encourage the client to follow the instructions given by the doctor. CAREGivers should not recommend treatment options to their clients. If you have any concerns about any condition your client may be experiencing report them to your local franchise office. In the event of an emergency, call 911.
How a CAREGiver Can Assist a Client with Arthritis

Your responsibility as a CAREGiver working with a client with arthritis is to help maintain her independence and provide a safe environment. There are several areas where you can assist a client with arthritis:

- Encourage daily activity
- Help to prevent falls
- Prepare nutritious meals
- Assist with activities of daily living

Encourage Daily Activity

It was once thought that people with arthritis should avoid physical activity because it could lead to joint damage, but today, doctors and therapists know that proper exercise can improve the health and fitness of arthritis patients without hurting their joints.

The disease process of arthritis and the damage it causes may lead to limited joint range of motion; decreased muscle strength and endurance; and general deconditioning. Research shows that even a limited amount of exercise can help prevent some of the negative effects of arthritis by:

- strengthening muscles that support painful or damaged joints
- building stronger bones
- helping with weight loss or maintenance
- improving or maintaining joint flexibility
- improving balance
- promoting sleep and sense of well-being.

Regular exercise can also reduce the risk of heart disease, which can be a problem for people with certain forms of arthritis.

In general, a client with arthritis should avoid activities that involve running, jumping or jarring the joints. Walking is a popular form of exercise that almost anyone with arthritis can do. Other popular and effective forms of physical activity for people with arthritis include:

- aquatic exercise or swimming
- riding a stationary cycle
- using an elliptical machine
- gardening
- dancing
- yoga
- tai chi.

Your client’s doctors may prescribe an exercise plan for the client to follow regularly. You can encourage the client to follow the plan and help provide a safe environment.
Prevent Falls

Fall prevention is an important issue for people with arthritis. Studies show that arthritis in the lower extremities increases the risk of falls, as does the use of certain medications. A fall can be particularly dangerous for people with arthritis who take corticosteroids to relieve inflammation. Long-term use of corticosteroids leads to significant thinning of the bones, which makes fractures of the hip, wrist and vertebra more likely with any fall. There are several ways CAREGivers, clients and their families can help reduce the risk of falls around the home:

• Keep stairways secure by providing sturdy handrails on both sides of the stairs. It is also helpful if stairs are carpeted or have a textured surface.
• Remove clutter and electrical cords from floors.
• Arrange furniture to make rooms easy to navigate
• Remove or secure throw rugs.
• Use assistive devices to retrieve items from high shelves.
• Use a cane when walking on uneven surfaces.
• Encourage clients to wear shoes with non-slip soles.
• Ask clients to avoid walking in stocking feet on wood floors.
• Replace shoe laces that tie with elastic ones that won’t come untied and present a tripping hazard.
• Organize the house so items used most frequently are at waist level, minimizing the need to bend or climb.
• Make sure the home and stairways are well lit.
• Use a night light and/or leave a light on in the bathroom to reduce the risk of falls in the dark.
Prepare Nutritious Meals

Many foods can affect a client’s arthritis symptoms. Some foods may help fight inflammation, while others may trigger arthritic flares (increase in symptoms). Look in the Client Journal to find out if your client has a suggested diet. If not, try to incorporate foods that may help fight inflammation (see chart below). Maintaining a healthy weight can also help manage joint pain.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Helps to Fight Inflammation</th>
<th>Foods to Avoid</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Fruits and vegetables</td>
<td>• Saturated fats</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Whole grains</td>
<td>• Trans fats</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Fish</td>
<td>• Salt or sodium</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Nuts &amp; seeds</td>
<td>• Sugars</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Olive oil</td>
<td>• Alcohol</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Beans</td>
<td>• Dairy products</td>
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<td>• Fiber</td>
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Before preparing a meal, make sure you know what your client can and cannot eat. It is important to know if the client has food allergies or if certain types of food upset her stomach or cause digestive problems. Always review the Client Journal for doctors’ instructions.
Tips to Assist with Activities of Daily Living

A client with arthritis should maintain daily activities and routines as much as possible. Bathing; dressing; grooming; cleaning; cooking; traveling; driving or using mass transportation; and enjoying friends, family and leisure activities promote independence and provide much needed social interaction.

Many people with arthritis require help with some activities of daily living. Here are a few helpful tips for managing daily activities with arthritis:

• Use tape or a foam curler to build up the handles of toothbrushes, hairbrushes and cutlery to make them easier to grasp.

• Place a towel on the edge of the bathtub for the client to sit on, then have her swivel on the towel to get in or out of the tub.

• Encourage the client to put on an absorbent terry-cloth robe after showering or bathing and relax for a few minutes instead of toweling off.

• Use automatic soap and shampoo dispensers in the bathtub or shower instead of a slippery bar of soap.

• If client is able, encourage him to use a sock aid and long-handled shoehorn to put on socks and shoes.

• Remove the buttons from shirts, sew the buttons over the buttonholes and add Velcro® fasteners to replace the buttons. The shirt fastens easily and always looks buttoned.

• Arthritis in the spine or hips may make it difficult for the client to get into a car. Try covering the seat with a plastic garbage bag first, then slide right in.

Activity

Using the lines below, list other ideas how a CAREGiver could assist a client with arthritis.

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Assistive Devices

Assistive devices can be used to help your client to complete tasks easier. Examples of assistive devices include:

- Button assist tool
- Automatic chair/seat lift
- Kitchen utensils with large grips
- Plates with curved sides – allows the client to trap food and push it onto utensils
- Raised toilet seats
- Extended reachers

There are many other types of assistive devices available. If you believe your client would benefit from using an assistive device, call the franchise office.

Recognize, Report and Record

Your role as a CAREGiver is to:

1. understand your client’s medical conditions;
2. observe how these conditions affect her life;
3. recognize changes that may occur; and
4. report and record information relevant to her care.

If you notice that your client’s arthritis symptoms have increased or have become more severe, call the franchise office to report the changes. Write those changes in the Client Journal to inform other CAREGivers or family members.
What We Have Learned

Now that you have completed this class, you can:

3. List three different types of arthritis and their symptoms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Arthritis</th>
<th>Symptoms</th>
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2. List ways you can support your clients who have arthritis.