

August 2002

Osteoarthritis Risks and Possible Remedies

A New York Times Personal Health article dated July 30, 2002 reported that nearly 21 million Americans have at last some unwelcome familiarity with the pain of osteoarthritis. This leading cause of life-changing disability can only become more acute as the ranks of the elderly population swell to include the "baby boomers."

Basically what happens is the following: The articular cartilage that exists in every joint in your body is there to provide an efficient, gliding surface to cushion the impact between the bones that form the joints as you move around and exert yourself. However, this cartilage loses its suppleness as time goes on until the synovium - the tissue that lines the joints - can become inflamed and wear thin. The bones can then become misshapen in the absence of lubrication resulting in long-term damage.

Several studies related to this condition have been published in the medical literature, according to Stephen E. Straus, M.D., National Director for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM). "Those short-term, controlled clinical trials suggest that glucosamine is effective in relieving pain and increasing the range of motion in patients with osteoarthritis."

Benefits of preventative care including dietary supplementation

- Physical therapy to help increase muscle strength that supports joints with emphasis on how to minimize joint stress.
- Regular aerobic exercises and swimming can help reduce the pain of osteoarthritis. Both activities increase much needed circulation in the joints that is often lost because sufferers tend to unnecessarily limit their physical activities.
- Calcium supplements can be of particular help.
- Glucosamine - This is an amino-sugar naturally produced in humans and is the foundation of many of the body's tissues, including tendons, ligaments, cartilage, collagen, and membranes in the respiratory tract and synovial fluid in the joints.
- Devil's Claw - A herb which has reportedly been helpful in promoting joint mobility and reducing pain and swelling.
- The New York Times report cited above refers to research suggesting that vitamins C and D and possibly E may have a protective effect on the bones.