

'Tis the season for knee arthritis

Arthritis is the most common cause of disability among adults in the United States.

"You may have joint pain, decreased joint range of motion, swelling, stiffness and a feeling like your leg is giving out on you" said Dr. Renee Melfi of Regenerative Spine & Musculoskeletal Medicine.

"There is no known cure, so the goals are to control pain, maintain or improve joint mobility, and minimize disability."

Dr. Melfi is a Physiatrist specializing in non-operative spine and orthopedic medicine, and has performed thousands of injections since 2002. Dr. Melfi is also certified in Integrative Medicine and Acupuncture, and offers suggestions to enhance your results with recommendations for proper nutrition and supplements.

"Now that we are in the middle of winter, everyone's

joints are talking to them. There is worsening of arthritis with barometric pressure changes, and it manifests the most with damp weather and cold weather," she said. "I have so many patients who come to me and are looking for options other than years of cortisone shots and ultimately a knee replacement. You should try to keep your own 'parts' as long as possible."

Dr. Melfi recommends a few things you can do to help yourself feel better.

"In the first few days, you may rest, and use ice," she said. "After the first two days, get back to activity as tolerated. If you have pain for more than several weeks, you should see a physician."

Dr. Melfi said that weight loss will help to relieve the pressure on your joints and can only help both your knees and your general health. Consider trying an anti-inflammatory diet, like

the Mediterranean diet.

"What you eat can cause inflammation and can aggravate pain," she said. "There are lots of resources out there now, like anti-inflammatory diet cookbooks, but a simple place to start is avoiding sugar, starchy carbohydrates, and processed foods."

"One of the best things you could ever do for your health is to stop smoking" said Dr. Melfi, adding that studies show nicotine increases the risk for degeneration, and impairs bone and wound healing. "Smoking alters the processing of pain so that smokers feel increased pain levels."

Your doctor may send you to physical therapy to keep your body strong.

"Remember to listen to your body and respect the pain," Dr. Melfi said. "Modify tasks, avoid overuse, use correct posture, and consider assistive devices, such as a support sleeve, brace, wedged

insoles, shock absorbing footwear and a cane."

When it comes to injections, there are a number of choices.

"You should be careful about the number of steroid injections you receive in a joint," Dr. Melfi said. Corticosteroids, though safe when regulated by a physician, may have adverse effects if used too often. "Steroids target your cartilage cells, causing them to shrink and wear out even more if overused."

Other options do exist for joint injections. Your doctor can inject more hyaluronic acid into your knee to boost the supply. Hyaluronic acid helps cushion and lubricate the moving parts inside your knee.

"I am most excited about Orthobiologic (aka regenerative) injections," Dr. Melfi said. "Your own blood growth factors and stem cells can be injected into your knee joint to amplify the body's healing

response."

In Platelet Rich Plasma (PRP), a sample of your own blood is drawn and concentrated and, according to Dr. Melfi, these platelets are injected into the knee joint to promote healing by your body's own growth factors. Studies show PRP is superior to steroid injections for knee arthritis.

A stem cell is a type of cell in your body that is able to transform into another type of cell.

"Stem cells can be thought of as the general contractor of your body's own healing potential," Dr. Melfi said. "They bring together all the worker cells needed for your body to stimulate healing of damaged tissue." The most common source for a stem cell for knee injections is your own bone marrow, drawn up with a needle from bone in the back of your pelvis.

Make sure you ask your doctor where the cells come



Dr. Renee Melfi
Regenerative Spine & Musculoskeletal Medicine

from before you agree to this type of injection.

"Be aware that if they are not from your own body, they are not stem cells," Dr. Melfi said.

There are some places that use commercial birth tissue products.

"They have been marketed as stem cell injections, but are not," she said. "For knee and other orthopedic injections, studies have proven that these products contain no stem cells."

If you are having a joint injection, ask if it is with imaging guidance, which means a live x-ray or ultrasound is used to help your doctor guide the needle into the joint. Without live imaging guidance, it is possible that the medicine can miss the joint.

When all else fails, knee replacement is an option. It can be considered when there is severe pain, joint deformity, and limitations in function.



Renée S. Melfi, M.D.

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Dr. Renée S. Melfi is quadruple certified:

- Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (ABPM&R)
- Pain Medicine (ABPM&R)
- Integrative Medicine (ABIHM)
- Medical Acupuncture (New York State)



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After injections, patients experience very little down time and typically avoid the long, painful rehabilitation that can follow surgery.

All injections and visits are performed by Dr. Melfi. We offer personalized care in a small office setting. No surgery center co-pays!

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