




Joint resolutions

there are several types
of *arthritis*. here's a
quick primer on a few
of the most common

by nancy christie



Think you're too young for arthritis? Think again. Far from being an "old people's disease," arthritis isn't age-specific,

says Patience White, M.D., chief public health officer for the Arthritis Foundation. Two-thirds of arthritis cases occur in patients younger than 65.

But while the causes, symptoms and treatments for each type may vary, White emphasizes that lifestyle changes such as keeping your weight in the ideal range and being physically

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active not only can help alleviate symptoms but also could halt the progression of the disease. “Every 10 pounds you carry is like 40 pounds across your knees because of the knee mechanics,” she explains.

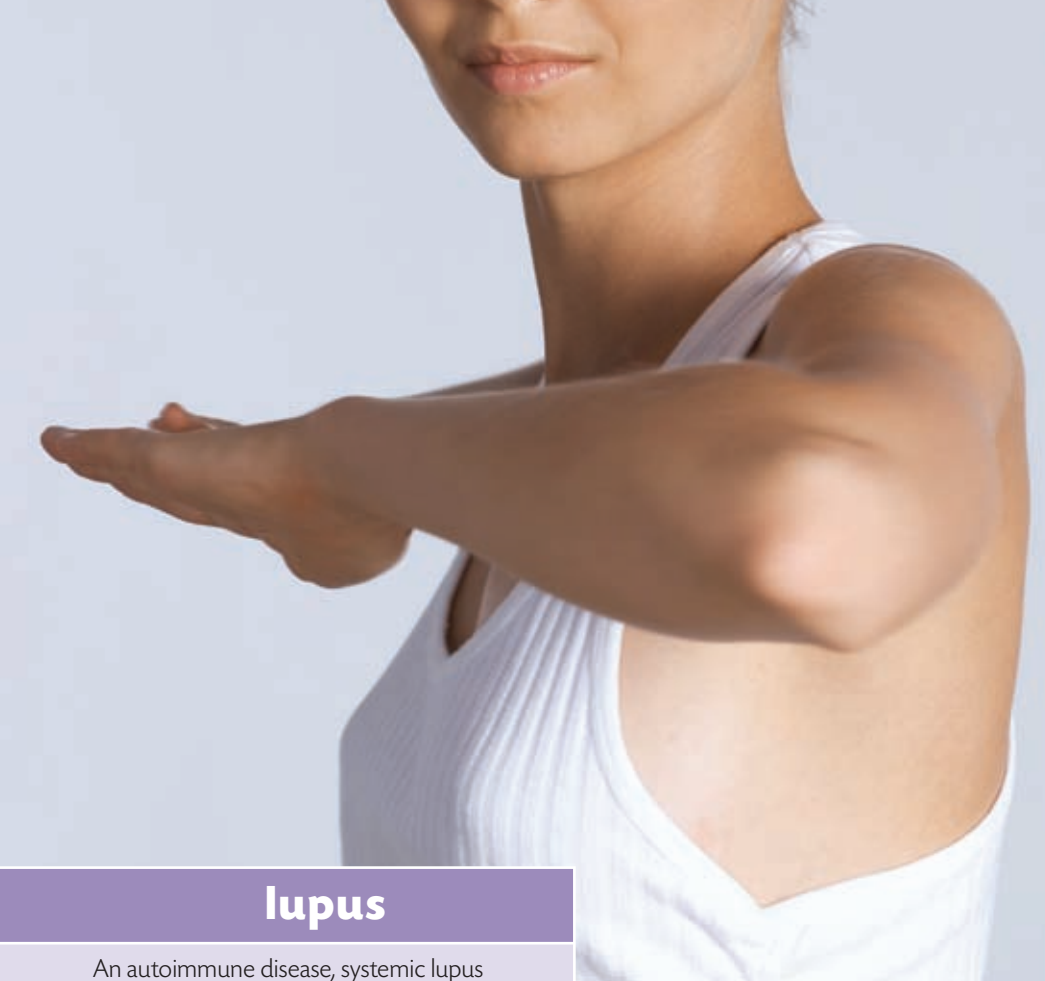
One of the best things you can do to lose weight is exercise. “Most people think you shouldn’t be moving your joints when they are affected with arthritis, but yes, you should,” White says. If you’re concerned about the effects on your joints, remember that exercise is not all running and racquetball. Instead, aim for 30 minutes five to seven days a week of low-impact exercises (like walking, swimming or tai chi) to keep or improve your joints’ range

of motion and to stretch and strengthen the surrounding muscles.

If your doctor thinks you have arthritis, any of the following might be ordered: blood work to check for antibodies and inflammation, synovial fluid examination, arthroscopic exam and imaging procedures. Depending on the results, treatment may include medication, massage, physical therapy, hyaluronan injections for osteoarthritis of the knee, joint replacement or resurfacing, or electrical stimulation.

While there are commonalities, arthritis is a general term for many types of the disease. In the chart below, you’ll find what you need to know about a few of the most common types.

	osteoarthritis	rheumatoid arthritis	gout
description	With osteoarthritis (OA), the cartilage cushioning the ends of the bone at the joint frays and wears away. Bones then rub together, leading to pain, stiffness and swelling. Weight-bearing joints (knees and hips) are primarily affected, along with the hands, spine and neck.	Occurring two to three times more often in women than in men, rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is an inflammatory disease of the synovium, or lining of the joint, tending to occur equally on both sides of the body. An autoimmune disease, RA can progress relatively quickly from joint pain and stiffness to loss of joint function and significant disability.	Gout is caused by an overproduction or under-excretion of uric acid, which leads to deposits of uric acid crystals in the joints, most often the big toe initially. It’s more common in men.
risk factors	While you may have a genetic predisposition to OA, White emphasizes that other risk factors are controllable and, to some extent, preventable. These include excess weight, inactivity, past joint injury, a form of arthritis such as rheumatoid arthritis that can injure cartilage and lead to secondary OA, and possibly alignment issues, which can cause one side of the joint to wear more than the other.	RA “is a disease that has a strong genetic component, but the environment also plays a key role,” says James R. O’Dell, M.D., president of the American College of Rheumatology Research and Education Foundation. Smoking is the most important modifiable risk factor, he adds.	While genetics plays a significant role in 20 percent of gout sufferers, other risk factors include excess weight, a diet rich in purines (such as beer, yeast, organ meats and certain vegetables) and other health problems such as high blood pressure.
treatment	Medication includes over-the-counter or prescription-strength nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) (aspirin, naproxen or ibuprofen), or acetaminophen (which affects the way the body senses pain).	New developments include using disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARDs) to decrease pain and inflammation, reduce or prevent joint damage, and preserve the structure and function of the joints, and biologicals that target the immune system molecules involved in RA.	For attacks, NSAIDs may ease the pain. Preventive treatments include drugs to increase uric acid elimination and a low-purine diet, notes health consultant Maurice A. Ramirez, D.O.



strength in numbers


If you suffer from rheumatoid arthritis, it may help to talk with others who have the disease. Join the Arthritis Foundation's online community, RA Connect. Go to arthritis.org/resources.php, and click "RA Connect." From the resources page, you also can access the foundation's other information and tools for people with arthritis.

go

lupus

An autoimmune disease, systemic lupus erythematosus (also known as lupus or SLE) develops when the body's immune system attacks the patient's own tissues—the skin, joints, kidneys, lungs, nervous system and other organs. Symptoms include skin rashes, arthritis, fatigue and fever, with periods of remission and relapse. Ninety percent of lupus sufferers are women, O'Dell notes, often in their teens and 20s.

Researchers have been unable to fully understand the interaction between genetics and environment that causes lupus. Recent research suggests a defect in the biological process that clears old or damaged cells from the body, triggering the immune system response.



Typical medications are NSAIDs, the anti-malarial drug hydroxychloroquine and steroids.

what else can i do?

If you are searching for complementary remedies for your arthritis, Jacob Teitelbaum, M.D., author of *Pain Free 1-2-3* (McGraw-Hill, 2004), has the following suggestions.

Before consuming unregulated substances, check with your doctor for possible drug and supplement interactions. For more information, visit the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine at nccam.nih.gov.

WILLOW BARK might ease inflammation in osteoarthritis of the hip and knee.

CHERRIES may decrease inflammation related to gout and osteoarthritis.

BOSWELLIA, an Asian herb, may be effective for rheumatoid arthritis and osteoarthritis, possibly reducing inflammation and pain.

HOPS may inhibit inflammation, relax muscles and help promote sound sleep.

FISH OIL acts as an anti-inflammatory.

GLUCOSAMINE AND CHONDROITIN SULFATE have possible benefits for symptoms and function, and may reduce other medication requirements.

Mind-body techniques such as relaxation, hypnosis, visual imagery, meditation, yoga, biofeedback, tai chi, qi gong, cognitive-behavioral therapies and group support also have shown promise in pain management.