

## Arthritis

Many people have stiffness and trouble moving especially as it gets cooler – what is arthritis and what can help it?

### What is arthritis?

- Arthritis is the name for a group of conditions affecting the joints resulting in pain and stiffness.
- Osteoarthritis – this is the most common and generally considered “wear and tear” on joints. The hips, knees, fingers and big toe are the most commonly affected.
- Rheumatoid arthritis – this is an autoimmune condition where the immune system attacks the healthy tissue lining the joints.

### Who gets arthritis?

- Arthritis affects people of all backgrounds, ages and lifestyles.
- In Australia, one in six people will get arthritis and two thirds of people with arthritis are between the ages of 15 and 60.

### What are the symptoms?

- The most common symptoms are pain and stiffness, swelling and redness or heat around a joint.
- Just because a joint is sore doesn't mean you have arthritis – you may have an injury or maybe used the joint in an unusual way.

### If you have a joint injury does this mean you'll get arthritis?

- Not necessarily – but you have an increased risk of getting it at some time in the future.

### What else increases the risk of arthritis?

- Age – the older you are, the more you've used your joints creating wear and tear.
- Obesity – extra weight put excessive strain on the joints especially the knees, hips and spine.
- Genetics – arthritis often seems to run in families.

### Does arthritis get worse during the cooler months?

- Maybe – but other things may be contributing!
- As the days are shorter and cooler, people tend to move less which means the flow of nutrients and oxygen to the joints is less contributing to pain.
- Many people feel low or depressed during winter and low mood has been linked to higher levels of perceived pain.

### What can help arthritis during the cooler months?

- Exercise – get moving! Exercise increases flexibility and the blood flow to the joints. It also strengthens the muscles around the joints. But be aware – not all exercise is good for arthritic joints: high impact jumping will not help arthritic knees!
- Keep a healthy weight – this will avoid unnecessary strain on the joints.
- Keep warm – Warm joints have a good blood supply and warm muscles are more flexible. If going outside rug up and if going swimming, don't get cold when you get out of the water.
- Avoid falls – wear good shoes if the ground is icy and consider using a stick or ski-poles for extra stability. If you have arthritic knees, ankles or hips, seek out stabilising exercises to strengthen them.
- Acupuncture – Research has shown that acupuncture can decrease pain, improve mobility and the quality of life for people with osteoarthritis.