



Coping With Arthritis on the Job

Quality Health News

Working with arthritis can be challenging, but these tips can help make it easier.

Approximately 20 percent of Americans are living with some form of arthritis or chronic joint symptoms, according to the Arthritis Foundation. And more than half of those affected are under the age of 65. This means that there are millions of arthritis sufferers working either full- or part-time in the United States.

Nevertheless, the common symptoms of arthritis--pain, stiffness, and swelling--can be hard to cope with, especially in the workplace. But according to experts, if the condition is well managed, most people can continue to successfully work. Follow these four tips to better manage arthritis on the job.

Stand up straight. Good posture can greatly minimize stress on the joints as well as the spine, according to the American Physical Therapy Association. To improve your posture, stand with your feet 12 inches apart and the outsides of your feet parallel. Keep your weight evenly distributed between both feet, with your shoulders drawn back and down. It also helps to visualize a string attached to the top of your head, gently lifting you up.

Take a load off your knees. Losing even a small amount of weight can take significant pressure off of your knees. According to the Arthritis Foundation, every time you take a step, the force across your knees and hips is two to three times your body weight. For example, if you weigh 160 pounds, your knees and hips are shouldering the burden of somewhere around 400 pounds when you walk. This can be a major handicap for a person whose joints have deteriorated. Losing just 10 pounds can remove up to 30 pounds of pressure from your knees when you walk.

Stick to sensible shoes. High-heeled and pointed shoes can put unnecessary pressure on the nerves and joints in your legs and feet. A study at Boston's Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital found that the movements of women who frequently wear heels of at least two inches (including thick heels) increases torque (twisting force) at the knee, which strains the joint near the back of the kneecap. This stress can increase wear and tear on the knee and exacerbate the symptoms of arthritis.

Know your limitations. Living with arthritis means assessing what you can realistically do and not do and then finding new ways of doing the same thing without straining or injuring yourself. This might mean resting your wrists on a special cushion while typing or using wheeled devices to transfer heavier items.

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