World Physiotherapy Day: Arthritis needn’t hold you back

Arthritis is the biggest single cause of disability in New Zealand – but with the right treatment, you can still enjoy an active and independent life.

That’s the message from Physiotherapy New Zealand (PNZ), supported by Arthritis New Zealand, this World Physiotherapy Day (8 September 2011).

PNZ President Gill Stotter says people who use physiotherapy as part of their arthritis treatment are stronger, fitter, more flexible – and in less pain.

“Research shows that exercise and stretching are vital for people with arthritis. So while it’s true that modern arthritis drugs can provide significant relief for some people, keeping moving is crucial.

“It’s important, though, that people with arthritis get the right balance between activity and rest – and it needs to be activities you enjoy, so it doesn’t feel like a chore. That’s where your physio comes in. They’ll assess your symptoms and help to work out an activity plan, including a range of exercises, that’s right for your particular situation. They may also suggest some remedies that will help to decrease pain and stiffness.

“Your physio’s aim is to assist you to self-manage your arthritis as much as possible. Then you can get on and enjoy a more active life, knowing you’re doing the right things to manage your arthritis.”

Arthritis New Zealand CEO Sandra Kirby said: “Arthritis affects half a million New Zealanders – and half of these are of working age. The total cost of arthritis in New Zealand was estimated last year at $3.2 billion, or 1.7% of GDP. (Access Economics: The Economic Cost of Arthritis in New Zealand in 2010).

“While some people are prone to develop arthritis because of a family history of the condition, other types of arthritis – such as osteoarthritis, or ‘wear and tear’ on weight-bearing joints – can be prevented or delayed by maintaining a healthy weight through diet and exercise and ensuring that injured joints are treated promptly by a qualified physiotherapist.”

Anyone wanting to find their nearest physio can go to www.physiotherapy.org.nz or ask their doctor to recommend one. To find out more about arthritis, go to www.arthritis.org.nz.

Facts
- Arthritis means ‘inflamed joint’. When the joint is inflamed it can be sore, stiff, hot, red and swollen
- There are more than 140 different kinds of arthritis
- Osteoarthritis is the most common
  - It’s caused by ‘wear and tear’ on weight-bearing joints (mainly hips and knees)
  - It affects more women than men
  - Age is a factor: your chances of developing osteoarthritis increase as you get older
Osteoarthritis: Helpful Tips

- If you damage a joint, get treatment straight away from a physio to minimise the risk of developing osteoarthritis later
- Maintain a healthy weight so you don’t put strain on your joints
  - Your physio or doctor can advise you on a suitable weight range for your height and age
  - A good diet – plenty of fruit and vegetables; fewer fatty, salty, sweet foods – will help you maintain a healthy weight
- Keep moving: Aim for half an hour of activity most days
- Chunk down your exercise time into 10-minute blocks if you find that easier
  - Keep an exercise diary so you can monitor yourself
- Find activities you enjoy and that don’t cause you pain
  - Swimming, walking and cycling are ideal because they don’t strain your joints
- If your joints are stiff and sore – see a physiotherapist. They can assess your symptoms and either treat you or refer you to your doctor
  - It’s important to rest if your arthritis symptoms flare up
- Wear sturdy shoes that support your feet properly, especially when you’re taking exercise
- Sometimes a walking stick, used correctly, can make it easier for you to get around and lessen your risk of falling – your physio can advise you on this
- If certain activities cause you pain or discomfort, spread them through the day with rests in between
- Visit your physio at least once a year: they’ll help you stay on track and positive, tweak your exercise plan, treat new symptoms and set new goals.

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