

## An Arthritis Primer

By: Dr. Jennifer T. Murphy, Chiropractic Physician

Arthritis is defined in Taber's Medical Dictionary as "inflammation of a joint, usually accompanied by pain, swelling, and frequently, changes in structure". This definition has become so blurred by both physicians and patients that everything that hurts is arthritis. I'm going to attempt to clarify some misconceptions about arthritis, what it looks like, how to identify it and treatments available. First, let's identify the most common types of arthritis.

Osteoarthritis is a chronic disease involving weight bearing joints causing destruction of articular cartilage, overgrowth of bone with lipping and spurring formation, and impaired function. Diagnosed easily by X-ray, films will show osteophytes (bone spurs), decreased space between joints and a degenerative fuzziness along the borders of the bone. This is by far the most common arthritis. Most people are surprised to learn that this condition can begin to show up in the early twenties and can usually be traced back to injuries (auto accident, childhood falls, and athletic injuries). Early prevention and treatment is important and bears out the expression "Youth is wasted on the young". What you do to your body in youth stays with you. As osteoarthritis progresses, joints lose motion and become more inactive and painful. In advanced stages of arthritis, it is usually recommended that exercise be performed in water due to the decreased stress applied to the joint in a non-weight bearing environment.

Rheumatoid arthritis is a chronic form of inflammation of the joints, accompanied by stiffness, swelling, cartilaginous hypertrophy and pain. A positive rheumatoid factor (an immunoglobulin present in serum) is a helpful tool in determining this diagnosis. The condition is a deforming arthritis, especially noticeable in the hands and feet. The joints become enlarged and change shape, causing curling of the digits. Rheumatoid arthritis is frequently misdiagnosed. Treatments are ever changing, but there is currently no cure. At times, bed rest is a necessity.

Psoriatic arthritis is a form of arthritis that develops usually after psoriasis (skin condition) has developed. This condition comes and goes just like breakouts of psoriasis do. It can occur throughout the body, and there are no really effective treatments to date.

Next month we will finish our discussion on arthritis with a look at the various treatments available; medicinal, surgery, naturopathic remedies, chiropractic, and "old-timey" remedies.