

REGULAR EXERCISES AND HEALTHY EATING CAN WARD IT OFF Arthritis in old age is manageable

BY STELLA NAIGINO

As people age, their bodies undergo certain changes, making them prone to certain diseases such as arthritis. However, the challenge is when they seek intervention from friends, they are told that their condition is caused by old age, which makes many reluctant to seek medical attention. However, experts say arthritis in old age is manageable.

Denis Isiko, 60, a resident of Namulyango in Seeta, Mukono district, is a victim of arthritis and he recalls how it started. He says two years back, he used to wake up with painful joints, sometimes he had fever and he could hardly move from his bed.

It would take him about 30 minutes to stand up and move his feet. This came with a lot of pain around his knee and he thought that since he was aging, it was normal.

When the pain increased, Isiko sought medical attention, only to be told that his tendon had given way and that was why he was feeling such pain. The doctor described Isiko's condition as arthritis.

WHAT IS ARTHRITIS?

According to Dr Joseph Baluku of Mulago Hospital, arthritis is a term that is used to describe swollen joints after they have been inflamed due to a number of reasons. This can also affect the muscles and other body tissues, especially for the elderly.

He says arthritis has many types which include osteoarthritis and rheumatoid and juvenile arthritis. However, juvenile arthritis is common in children of 16 years and below, while osteoarthritis and rheumatoid usually affect adults, and those in old age are affected more.

"Osteoarthritis occurs when tissues inside your joints breakdown, making them inflamed and the person will start feeling pain. With rheumatoid arthritis, the cells in your joints are attacked, making the joints swollen, painful and stiff," he explains.

Baluku notes that the cause of arthritis is not clear, but it is important that people watch their lifestyle and do a lot of exercise to avoid it.

According to international statistics, one out of every 100 people has arthritis. Arthur Junju, the executive director of the Uganda Arthritis Association, says out of Uganda's population of about 35 million, 310,000 people are



Arthritis can also affect the muscles and other body tissues, causing swellings and deformations

suffering from arthritis.

"Many are still in communities, but unaware of the condition they are in. These are brought to hospital when the disease is in advanced stages," he says.

Junju says the biggest challenge is that people are not aware of the disease. Most people, including medical personnel, have misconceptions about the signs and symptoms of arthritis disease.



SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Dr Steven Mukasa notes that the first sign is when a person, especially the elderly, starts feeling pain around the joints. "This happens because the tendon is either dying away or is affected and is giving way," Mukasa says.

He describes the tendon as the hinge in between joints which helps protect the bones

from rubbing against each other.

"When it is affected and it is no more, the person will feel a lot of pain because without the tendon, bones in the joint begin to rub directly against each other," he explains.

He says bones that normally suffer from arthritis are knee and hip bones that are weight

bearing bones.

Other symptoms include swelling and stiffness of joints. This can also affect other joints like those of the hands, among others.

People with such issues usually find hard time when waking up in the morning. They also cannot move for long journeys.

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WAYS TO MANAGE ARTHRITIS

1 CHANGE THE WAY YOU EAT

Arthur Junju, the executive director of Arthritis Association of Uganda, says studies show that a wide variety of foods, from strawberries to olives to fish, can help reduce inflammation, while selenium and Vitamin D may have preventative effects.

2 REDUCE WEIGHT

Mukasa notes that it is important that people always know how many kilograms they weigh and see if their weight matches with their height. "This information is available any time from trained medical personnel and in case the medical person asks you to cut weight, simply do so," he advises. "Watch what you eat and always have more fruits so that you do not miss out on the nutrients that are in fruits and that way your immunity will be boosted," he says.

3 DON'T GIVE UP ON EXERCISING

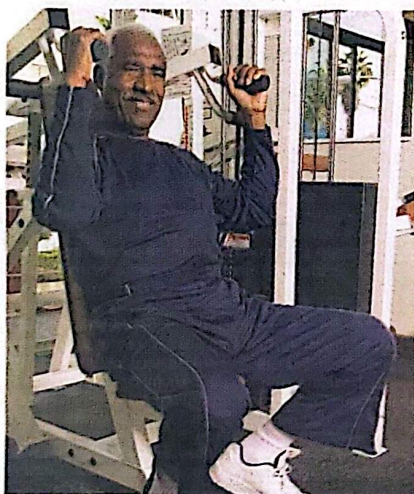
"When people age, they tend to rest a lot and ignore exercising. This puts you more at risk. Exercising is one way of keeping your body active and that way you will keep arthritis away," Mukasa explains.

However, he cautions those who are suffering from arthritis to engage in simple exercises that do not cause them a lot of pain.

4 SEEK TREATMENT

Much as most people think that this illness has no cure, seeking treatment helps in improving muscle tone, reduce on stiffness to enable the victim walk with ease. He advises that victims should avoid wearing the wrong shoes because these cause more pain.

"Wear flat shoes that are light so that you do not have to use a lot of energy to walk. Also, use walking sticks to help you while walking so that you do not overstress the affected area while walking," he says.



Arthritis is common in the elderly because of their weak muscles and joints. Regular exercising is, therefore, recommended

WHO IS AT RISK?

THE ELDERLY

"As people age, their muscles and joints become weak each other day, making them prone to arthritis," Dr Joseph Baluku says.

PEOPLE WHO ARE OVERWEIGHT

"Whenever someone puts on more weight, the lower body joints get stressed because they have to carry a lot of weight. The more stressed part of the body is the knees that have to carry more weight. This increases the likelihood of overweight people to suffer from arthritis when they grow old," he explains.

THOSE WHO HAVE SUFFERED INJURIES

According to Dr Steven Mukasa of St Vincent Hospital Nsambya, those who have sustained injuries several times, are prone to suffer from arthritis due to increased stress in certain joints of their body. He adds that this is also common to people who have suffered from bone fractures.

However, he notes that some people just inherit this illness from their parents. He cautions people with such history to watch out and consider preventing this from happening to them by exercising a lot.

