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THE IMPACT OF ARTHRITIS CAN BE LIMITED, MAY 2004

You have probably heard that obesity and inactive lifestyles are contributing to soaring increases in health problems and related healthcare costs. One health issue which affects one in three adults and 300,000 children in the United States is arthritis. May is National Arthritis Month, so I thought I'd share with you the following information from *The Arthritis Foundation*.

Arthritis can have dramatic impacts on people's lives, limiting their ability to work and care for themselves and their families. It also affects our nation's economy, at a cost of nearly \$125 billion annually. Arthritis accounts for 39 million physician visits and more than a half million hospital visits each year. Despite the rising prevalence and significant costs, there are steps that can be taken to prevent or limit the progression of the disease. Some studies show small changes can reduce the impact of arthritis. Losing 11 pounds, for example, can cut the risk of developing knee osteoarthritis by 50 percent for some women.

By following 11 simple steps, people with arthritis can limit its impact on their lives.

1. ***Don't ignore joint pain.*** Studies show joint damage occurs early in some forms of arthritis, often within the first two years. If you have joint pain that lasts for more than two weeks, see your doctor.
2. ***Get a specific diagnosis.*** There are more than 100 forms of arthritis, each requiring a different treatment. Work with your doctor on a comprehensive treatment plan.
3. ***Shed excess weight.*** The more you weigh, the more stress you put on your joints, especially your knees, hips, back and feet.
4. ***Get active.*** Regular exercise protects joints by strengthening the muscles around them, lessens pain, increases range of movement and reduces fatigue. Try to spend 30 minutes per day on most days of the week doing a physical activity you enjoy.
5. ***Maintain a healthy diet.*** For optimal health, it's important to eat a balanced, healthy diet. Recent research points to the importance of vitamin C and other antioxidants in reducing the risk of osteoarthritis. If you are looking for a snack, reach for an orange or a glass of orange juice for disease fighting antioxidants.
6. ***Think big.*** To protect your joints, always use the largest and strongest joint possible to complete the task. The larger the surface you have to spread the weight over, the better. Carry large items close to your body, using your arms instead of your hands to reduce the risk of injuries.
7. ***Play smart.*** Protect yourself from joint injury during physical activities by warming up properly and varying use of muscle groups. Wear joint braces or guards to alleviate

joint stress and reduce the risk of injury. Consider low impact activities like biking or swimming that offer calorie-burning benefits without adding stress to the joints.

8. **Modify job tasks.** Repetitive motion has been shown to increase the risk of developing arthritis. Schedule your day so that you can alternate job tasks and avoid using the same joints repeatedly. Take frequent breaks to stand and stretch stiff joints and sore muscles.

9. **Relax.** Be good to yourself. Stress is a common trigger of joint pain and fatigue. Treat yourself to a massage or a warm bath. Both have been proven to relieve muscle tension and ease joint pain. Remember that better emotional health often equals better physical health.

10. **Quit smoking.** Smoking can reduce bone mass, leading to osteoporosis and a greater risk of fractures. It can also increase your risk of complications from several forms of arthritis and prolong recovery from surgeries. Get the help you need to kick the habit. For additional information on quitting, talk to your doctor or contact the health department at 284-3371.

11. **Take control.** Making even the smallest changes can result in big payoffs in preventing or controlling arthritis.

If you would like additional information on limiting the impact of arthritis, contact the Arthritis Foundation at www.arthritis.org or 1-800-735-0096.

-Submitted by Cathy Ferguson, MPH, Public Health Administrator