

Written by Mark

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Some people think that we're all destined to develop arthritis. The older we get, the more prone we are to it. But those fears are unfounded. The truth is, arthritis could be caused by many things. Studies have found that it's merely related to aging, but not caused by it. Need proof? Just think about that perfectly healthy and active 90-year-old.

Amazingly, there are more than 100 types of arthritis. The most common is osteoarthritis, simply defined as a degradation of joints. The cartilage that encases and protects joints is mostly to blame. This "cushion" around the ends of our bones degenerates or loses the water that keeps it resilient, and in extreme cases our bones rub against each other when we move. But that can be just the beginning of the problem. If we're in constant pain when we move, we might stop moving altogether to avoid the pain. That results in a loss of muscle strength.

An injury might trigger the first flare-up of arthritis. Inflammatory diseases like gout could also do it. Unstable ligament structure, diabetes, or infections of the joints might also be culprits. But the most obvious cause might be obesity; when we put constant stress on our "load-bearing" joints like our knees and hips, they'll eventually break down.

A lot of research has also revealed what does NOT cause arthritis, contrary to what many believe. Cracking your knuckles, for instance, doesn't break down that cartilage; neither does repeated exercise of the same joints, like running.

Massage helps both body and spirit

As a palliative measure, massage can help arthritis pain immensely. Studies have shown that it reduces pain caused by joint spasms. People with arthritis in their hands, for instance, had a stronger grip after a massage session. Massage also releases endorphins into your bloodstream, which not only decreases pain but leads to an overall feeling of well being.

That feeling of well-being is crucial to the management of chronic conditions. Lower levels of

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anxiety and depression allow us to function more effectively in our day to day activities. More importantly, we simply take better care of ourselves when we feel good, and we're more eager to spend time with family and friends, which also makes us feel good.

But back to the physical benefits: massage helps to loosen up the joints so that muscles and ligaments work more smoothly against each other. Plus, gentle stretches of the joints may help to release synovial fluid from the cartilage, a yoke-like substance whose sole purpose is to reduce friction between joints and ligaments. Think of it as the joints' natural lubrication.

My most important message to clients with arthritis is this: tell me about it before your massage. If I'm not aware of it, I might unknowingly put too much pressure on your affected area. And if you'd like to begin using massage to help manage arthritis, it will be important to commit to weekly visits during your first month or so, then monthly visits thereafter.

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