

Managing Pain and Maintaining Mobility

Oxford Health Plans Offers Tips on Alleviating Arthritis Pain

The wet winter weather and cold air will send 70 million Americans with arthritis searching for relief from sore and inflamed joints. Arthritis pain particularly affects older adults, as more than half of Americans have symptoms of osteoarthritis in at least one joint by age 65. While no cure for arthritis exists, people suffering from this condition can take a number of steps to decrease pain and maintain mobility.

Oxford offers the following tips for alleviating arthritis pain:

- Create an arthritis action plan. Work with your physician to create a plan that incorporates diet, exercise and strength-building movements to counteract the effects of arthritis.
- Gently move stiff joints through a full range of motions each day to maintain their maximum reach and strength. Consult a physician or physical therapist for exercises that will help improve range of motion.
- Use jar openers, pot movers, or long-handled brushes and combs to ease the stress of daily activities on joints. Many people also find it helpful to replace doorknobs with levers, which put less stress on joints.
- Get walking to keep joints flexible.
- Purchase a pair of comfortable shoes that relieve pressure placed on knees and hips.
- Visit a massage therapist. A massage from a certified massage therapist can help increase flexibility and circulation.
- Stretch regularly. Stretching is an easy way to keep joints and muscles flexible. Remember to start with easy stretches.
- Swim for exercise. This can be an alternative for many who are looking for an exercise that is less stressful on joints than weightlifting and jogging.
- Take a vacation to a dry, hot climate, which has been found to alleviate the symptoms of arthritis.

Communicating with Newborns Through Massage

Oxford Health Plans Provides Guide to Massage for Infants

The first form of communication that a parent has with his or her baby is through touch. To a newborn, touching is talking. Along with eye-to-eye and skin-to-skin contact, as well as the exchange of smiles and other facial expressions, baby massage provides one of the best ways for parents to build a lasting relationship with their child.

Baby massage is quite different from adult massage. First, it is important to pay attention to the amount of pressure exerted while massaging your baby. Strokes should be slow and gentle, traveling down the baby's body to produce a calming effect. While baby massage can be done any time during the day, some research suggests the best time to massage a baby is when he or she is awake and content.

Before beginning massage, it is important to do a little preparation work. This simple checklist is part of *A Guide to Baby Massage* booklet that is sent to Oxford Members who are new parents and should be followed before beginning infant massage:

- Wash your hands and remove any jewelry that may harm your baby.
- Remove your baby's clothing, being careful to make sure that the air temperature is not too cool. Ideally, the room temperature should be between 78 and 80 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Place your baby on his or her back on a flat surface that is covered by a soft blanket or towel.
- Choose a comfortable position and dip your fingers in oil.
- Perform a patch test to make sure that the oil does not irritate your baby's skin. If irritation does occur, do not use the oil.
- Rub hands together to warm the oil before touching your baby's skin.

Chasing Away the Winter Blues

Oxford Health Plans Offers Tips to Keep Busy This Winter

It's that time of year again when many adults begin to experience the winter blues. Heightened by the dreary, cold weather and increased time spent indoors, many find themselves searching for ways to pass the time before spring.

To help chase away their winter blues, we offer the following tips:

- Start a hobby like sewing, woodworking, ceramics, quilting, letter writing, painting or indoor gardening.
- Invite friends or family over for a meal once a month. Have each invitee prepare a dish to pass around during the meal.
- Create a scrapbook containing photos, a family tree, birth and marriage certificates, family stories, and other memories.
- Develop a newsletter with friends or family. Have participants send pictures, letters and stories to be highlighted in each edition.
- Get involved in community outreach activities through local churches, synagogues, charities, and community centers.
- Visit a local senior center to get out and meet people.



Make the Most of Your Doctor Visit

Oxford Health Plans Offers Tips to Open Doctor/Patient Communication

Studies show that more than 80 percent of a patient's diagnosis is based on what he tells the doctor, while only 20 percent is based on the actual physical exam. This surprising statistic indicates how essential two-way communication is between patients and physicians. Speaking openly about a health concern isn't always easy. Many people find it difficult to talk to their doctor about their health concerns.

We offer these tips to help you get the most out of your next doctor's visit:

- Assess any changes in your health. Bring a list of issues and questions to discuss, including side effects of any medications, changes in lifestyle habits, new symptoms that have arisen since your last visit, and ancillary treatments received from other providers.
- Educate yourself about your current health status and your body. Local libraries and the Internet both provide a wealth of information. However, be sure to discuss information gathered from secondary resources with your physician to guarantee that the information is up-to-date and correct.
- Doctors are concerned with their patients well-being. Do not feel embarrassed to discuss any physiological or psychological issues. Bring up important issues and questions early in the appointment to be sure to receive the time and attention you require. Remember to be clear and concise, while not overlooking any important details.
- Take notes or bring a trusted family member or friend to help remember recommended treatment plans and options, as well as diagnoses.
- Before you leave the office, be sure that all of your questions have been addressed. Make sure you know the name of the medications prescribed, the condition for which they are prescribed, the dosages recommended, how they work, any possible side effects, time period for treatment, and if any generic alternatives are available.



Tricks to Make Halloween a Treat for Children with Diabetes

Dressed in costumes resembling cartoon characters, movie stars, action heroes, and other fictional characters, children of all ages enjoy trick-or-treating on Halloween for their favorite candy bars and other sugary treats. For children with diabetes, Halloween should be no different.

To help children with diabetes have fun and stay healthy during Halloween, we offer these creative tips:

- Exchange candy collected while trick-or-treating with something else, such as a small toy or money.
- Work a piece of candy into your child's meal plan. Make sure candy's carbohydrate counts are figured into the meal plan and covered by your child's insulin.
- Suggest that your child select a few favorite treats to put away to snack on over an extended period of time.
- Instead of trick-or-treating, arrange to have your child and a few of his or her friends visit a haunted house or go on a hayride.
- Set aside a few favorite treats for when your child is feeling "low." Create a small bag of the remaining candy to take to the school nurse for times when your child needs a little added sugar boost.
- Hold a Halloween party. Invite your child's friends to carve pumpkins, bob-for-apples, have their faces painted, and join a costume contest. Prepare goodie bags filled with sugarless gum and candy, as well as Halloween stickers, pencils and erasers.

We offer a set of disease management programs to proactively help Members manage such chronic conditions as diabetes. Members enrolled in our *Living with Diabetes*SM program are educated on their condition and encouraged to work with their physician on a personal treatment plan to control diabetes.



Deck the Halls with Healthy Eating

Healthy Tips for the Holidays

High-calorie meals and decadent desserts are common fare at holiday parties and family get-togethers. This, coupled with the fact that people are less active during the winter months, makes it difficult to avoid adding a few extra pounds during the holidays. In fact, according to a *New England Journal of Medicine* study, few Americans lose the weight they gain each holiday season.

Oxford offers these healthy eating and cooking tips to use throughout the holidays:

- Cream cheese can often be replaced with low-fat yogurt cheese.
- Sour cream can often be replaced with low-fat yogurt.
- For a low-calorie, low-cholesterol egg substitute, purchase egg alternatives, such as Egg Beaters, or try this: mix one tablespoon nonfat dry milk granules, two large egg whites and two drops of yellow food coloring.
- Try reduced-calorie margarine.
- Use canola or corn oil instead of other all-purpose oils.
- Use nonstick vegetable cooking spray for baking sheets or frying pans.

Give the Gift of Health

Holiday Gift Ideas From Healthcare Professionals

Sweaters, neckties and fruitcakes will appear in gift boxes across the nation this holiday season. However, with New Year's resolutions on everyone's mind, the holidays are the perfect time to give health-related gifts.

To help friends and family get in shape and stay healthy, doctors and nurses at Oxford Health Plans offer these holiday gift ideas:

- Put together a fitness package to motivate someone to get in shape. Stuff a gym bag with such items as small weights, exercise videos, sneakers, workout clothes, a pedometer, or a jump rope.
- Give the gift of better breathing to those who suffer from asthma or allergies by giving an anti-bacterial mattress cover and a HEPA air filter.
- Purchase a diabetes monitoring kit to check glucose levels for people at risk for diabetes.
- Wrap up cholesterol test kits, blood pressure or body fat monitors, and healthy cookbooks for family members who are concerned with heart disease.
- Keep babies safe by giving new or expectant parents cabinet and oven locks, electrical outlet covers, baby gates, no-scratch mittens, corner cushions for hard furniture, or other baby safety products.
- Give travel-size first aid kits to college students or the person on the go.
- Help a smoker quit with such stop-smoking aids as the nicotine patch, nicotine gum, motivational books, and relaxation tapes.
- Give gift certificates for massages, exercise classes or health food stores.
- Sign someone up for a CPR course.

Oxford offers a host of preventive care and disease management programs to help members achieve their personalized health goals. Members with various conditions, such as cancer and congestive heart failure, receive individualized nurse case management and educational resources to help them better manage their conditions. For those members looking to de-stress or get in shape, we created a program called *Healthy Bonus*[®]. Through this program, Members receive discounts on gym memberships, spa services, child safety equipment, Weight Watchers[®], vision care services, and other health and wellness items and services.



Getting the Most Out of Fruits and Vegetables

Oxford Health Plans Provides Tips on Healthy Summer Eating

While it's easy to pick up a cookie to satisfy a sweet tooth, we all know that an apple or strawberry is a much healthier option. Promises to change one's eating habits tomorrow often don't work out and, now that summer is here, it's the perfect time to take advantage of the abundance of fresh fruits and vegetables available. Delicious tasting, these treats are a great source of vitamins and minerals. So, start today.

We offer some helpful hints to make your summer meals and snacks more nutritious:

- For salads, be sure to use dark green leaves such as spinach or romaine lettuce. These are loaded with antioxidants.
- Add beans to salads and soups to boost their protein content and enhance their taste and texture. Chickpeas, kidney beans, pinto beans, black beans, and red beans are all healthy, nutritious choices.
- Don't get stuck in a food rut; choose from a variety of vegetables. Go for deep or brightly colored vegetables such as peppers, tomatoes, zucchini, spinach, squash, and carrots. Bright, rich colors are a sign of highly nutritious foods filled with vitamins and minerals.
- Aim for a variety of colorful fruits such as kiwis, different kinds of berries, tangerines and melons — the more color, the more nutrients.
- Adding grains to soups and salads will boost carbohydrate intake and help make the meals more filling and satisfying. Instead of plain white rice, try different grains with more nutritional value, like brown rice, bulgur, barley, kasha, millet or buckwheat, which have more nutritional value.
- For even more satisfying meals, toss lean chicken or grilled fish onto salads to add protein, vitamins, minerals, and the heart-healthy omega-3 fatty acids.

Avoiding Summertime Burnout

Oxford Health Plans Offers These Tips to Beat the Summer Heat

Summer has arrived. It's time to pack the winter clothes away and break out the shorts and sunscreen. Before heading outdoors to spend some leisure time in the sun, remember to stay well hydrated and cool. This is especially important for older adults who are more prone to heat stroke.

To make the most of summer, we offer these tips:

- Avoid being in direct sunlight for long periods of time.
- Drink plenty of fluids, especially as your activity level rises.
- Wear appropriate clothing, such as loose clothing in light colors made out of natural fabrics. Avoid synthetics and dark colors that hold in and absorb heat.
- Wear sunscreen and a wide-brimmed hat, or use an umbrella to avoid sunburn and prevent heat stroke or exhaustion.
- Stay cool indoors. Air-conditioning is one of the best ways to stay cool. If you do not have an air conditioner or evaporative cooling unit, head for a shopping mall or public library for a few hours.
- Plan outdoor activities for either before noon or in the evening. While outdoors, rest frequently in shady areas.
- Take cool baths or showers
- Open windows at night when it's cooler, then close them during the day and cover with curtains or blinds to keep the cooler air inside.

Get "Ticked" Off

Oxford Health Plans Offers Tips on Avoiding Deer Ticks

It's springtime, and the woods are filled with forest animals. This seasonal increase – especially among the white-tailed deer that we often see grazing along the side of the road – creates an environment that supports the Lyme Disease-carrying deer tick. Ticks tend to live in moist, shady areas – especially in wooded or grassy environments – which accounts for the Northeast having the highest concentration of Lyme Disease in the country.

To reduce the risk of contracting Lyme Disease, we offer the following tips:

- Check hair, clothing and skin after spending time in wooded areas.
- When walking in wooded areas or tall grass, wear long pants tucked into your socks.
- Wear enclosed shoes, preferably boots, and light-colored clothing to easily detect deer ticks.
- Use insect repellants especially on legs and ankles that are effective for ticks.
- Keep long hair tied back.
- Avoid sitting directly on the ground or stone walls.
- Inspect pets for ticks, and ask your veterinarian about topical solutions to repel ticks.
- If a tick is embedded in skin, it should be removed using fine-tipped tweezers, gripping as close to the skin as possible. Do not use nail polish remover, matches or other common incorrect methods.

The early symptoms of Lyme Disease can be mild and overlooked. An individual may experience fatigue, swollen joints, chills, fever, headaches, and generalized soreness. The most distinguishing characteristic of Lyme Disease is an expanding rash that spreads from the site of a tick bite and looks like a bull's-eye. If you experience any of these symptoms, visit your primary care physician immediately.

No More Wheezing About School

Oxford Health Plans Provides Tips for Coping with Asthma in the Classroom

Asthma will cause 5.5 million American children to miss more school days this year than any other chronic condition. While many of these absences can be prevented by working with a physician to create an asthma management plan, there are a number of factors to consider when deciding whether to keep a child home from school due to asthma, including:

- Wheezing that continues to be labored an hour after medication is given;
- Difficulty breathing, weakness, or fatigue that makes it difficult to participate in usual daily activities.

To help children with asthma manage their condition at school and reduce the number of school days missed, please read the following suggestions:

- Keep a duplicate set of medications, spacer and peak flow meter at school. Periodically, check to make sure that medications have not exceeded their expiration dates.
- Monitor an asthmatic child during recess or physical education to determine whether he or she should take medications before participating in physical activities. If he or she complains of tightness in the chest or trouble breathing, he or she may need to take medication before participating in physical activity.
- When needed, children with asthma should take breaks during physical activity to prevent triggering an asthma attack. Recommended school sports for asthma sufferers include swimming (water tends to moisten the air that is inhaled), as well as football, softball, tennis, or any sport that involves brief bursts of activity with rests in between.
- Give a copy of the child's asthma action plan to teachers and to the school health office. Include possible asthma triggers for that child, medicines to use to treat asthma symptoms and changes in peak flow zones, and medication to use as a pretreatment before exercise.
- Create an emergency phone number list to give to the teacher and school health office. Include phone numbers for the child's physician(s) and for emergency contacts.

Oxford's *Better Breathing*[®] program is an educational program designed to help Members diagnosed with asthma better manage their condition. The program has successfully decreased the need for hospital admissions for asthmatics by 33 percent and emergency room visits by 21 percent. Members enrolled in the Better Breathing program receive individualized nurse case management, educational materials and mailings, and have access to an asthma hotline.



Moving The Couch Potato Outside

Oxford Health Plans Offers Tips to Help Teens and Preteens Stay Healthy This Summer

Summer creates the perfect opportunity for teens and preteens to enjoy outdoor activities and start some new health habits. But, according to the Centers for Disease Control, nearly half of American youths aged 12-21 are not vigorously active on a regular basis. For those individuals, we offer the advice: “Put down the remote and get outside...and take Mom and Dad, too”.

Oxford offers these tips to help teens and pre-teens stay active and healthy:

- Join a summer sports league or organize activities, such as a game of basketball or softball with a group of neighbors.
- For older teens, identify working opportunities at day camps, beach clubs, swimming pools or a local park, which will provide a little extra spending money and an opportunity to stay active.
- Wear non-comedogenic sunscreen, especially between the peak sun hours of 10:00 AM and 2:00 PM. It won't block pores and cause acne, but it will protect skin from harmful UV rays.
- Drink plenty of fluids, but remember soda and other caffeinated beverages can dehydrate you. Try sports drinks, water or juice instead.
- Sign up for swimming lessons or purchase a membership to the local pool. This is a great way to beat the heat while getting some exercise.
- Many gyms offer summer memberships for older teens and college students, providing a way to exercise in an air-conditioned environment.
- Sign up for a CPR or first aid course, which are often available through American Red Cross branches.
- Volunteer at a hospital or shelter to help keep others healthy.
- Start your own business. Dog walking, lawn mowing and gardening are great ways to earn money, stay active and be your own boss.
- Schedule an appointment for immunizations for the upcoming school year.



Preparing for a Healthy and Safe Trip Abroad

Oxford Health Plans Provides Health-related Travel Tips

Now more than ever, traveling abroad can be complicated. There's a lot to think about, but upon arrival the trip should be fun, exciting and relaxing — not stressful. In the midst of packing and making travel arrangements, it can be easy to overlook some of the details of proper healthcare. A little planning beforehand can help travelers have a smooth and healthy trip.

To help travelers have a healthy trip abroad, we offer these tips:

- Carry your Member identification card and a claim form.
- Understand your out-of-area medical insurance coverage. Only emergency care will be covered by Oxford when traveling overseas. Emergency care includes those services that are medically necessary due to an unforeseen illness, injury or condition.
- Pack a supply of prescriptions – in their original bottles – in a carry-on.
- If you have a major medical condition, wear a medical condition bracelet.
- Keep hydrated when in warm climates, especially when active. Use caution around water and ice. In many countries, drink bottled water.
- Peel fruits and vegetables to avoid contamination from pesticides and from the water used to wash them.
- Contact either the International Association for Medical Assistance to Travelers (IAMAT) at 716-754-4883 or the nearest U.S. embassy to locate medical facilities and English-speaking doctors in the areas where you're traveling.
- High-risk travelers, such as diabetics, severe asthmatics and pregnant women should consult their physicians before traveling to another country. According to the Centers for Disease Control, the safest time for a pregnant woman to travel is during weeks 18-24. Travel overseas is not recommended during the third trimester.
- Learn the words in the local language for “doctor,” “emergency” and “hospital.”
- For overall safety, travelers should exercise caution and be actively aware of their surroundings at all times.



Trimming the Holiday Menu

Tips from Oxford Health Plans for a Healthy Holiday Season

It's time once again to breakout the recipes for pumpkin pie, glazed ham and Mom's famous gravy. The holidays are upon us, bringing holiday cheer and a long list of things to do. For seniors, the constant "on the go" can wreak havoc on their health.

To relieve some of the holiday stress, we offer these cooking and cleanup tips:

- Make a list of dishes to serve. Prepare ones that can be frozen early in the season.
- Cook lighter. Switch from a 25-pound turkey to a 15-pound chicken or ham.
- Ask guests to bring a dish.
- Try to sit down while preparing food.
- Buy kitchen tools that help share the work (e.g., a food processor for chopping and a pot roller to move heavy pots and pans).
- Use a serving cart when moving food from the kitchen to the dining room, or serve food buffet-style.
- Involve grandchildren or young adults in the preparation process, sharing holiday traditions and secret recipes.
- Create shifts of setup and break-down teams to help set the table and cleanup after the meal.

Trading Sneakers for Yoga Mats

Oxford Health Plans Offers Tips on Yoga

From driving sporty cars to using complementary and alternative medicine (CAM), older adults are hipper than ever. They are among the crowd leading the growth in such alternative exercise programs as yoga, tai chi and pilates. Yoga is a particularly great way for adults to stay active, because it is easier on joints than walking or jogging, and individuals can work at their own pace.

We offer these tips for adults looking to start a yoga program:

- Consult your physician before beginning any exercise program.
- Enroll in a yoga class. Many community centers offer yoga classes. Contact community centers in your area to find out if they offer classes. If possible, speak with some of the yoga students about the demands of the class and instructor.
- Before choosing a yoga class:
 - Make sure the instructor is certified with the Yoga Alliance.
 - Find out how long the instructor has been practicing and teaching, and compare with other instructors in the area.
 - Ask if you need to bring a yoga mat or if one is provided for you.
- Try chair yoga. It is less strenuous than traditional forms of yoga and helps to enhance flexibility, strength and posture. It is especially popular among older adults who may have difficulty working out on a mat.
- Purchase a video to learn yoga at home. Since an instructor is not available to answer questions, try to find a family member or friend familiar with yoga to help explain the basics.
- Use extreme caution, and do not strain or hold a pose that hurts.