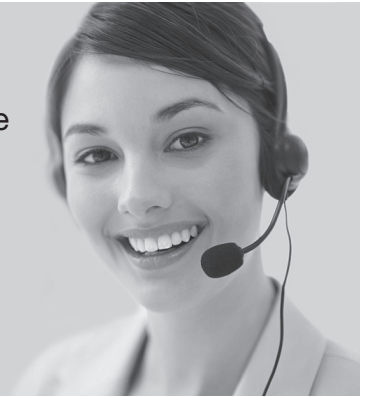


“It was great to talk with you.

Thank you for your interest in ‘How to Prevent and Treat Aches and Pains.’ I hope you find this tip sheet helpful.

Please give me a call if you have more questions about this or other topics.

As your UPMC Health Plan health coach, I am ready to help in any way I can.”



Do your muscles and/or joints hurt? It may be from everyday wear and tear. Or it may be from overuse or an injury. Aches and pains can also be caused by some chronic conditions.

Examples are:

- Osteoarthritis
- Rheumatoid arthritis
- Bursitis
- Gout
- Lupus
- Fibromyalgia

Prevention

Good body mechanics can prevent many day-to-day aches and pains. For example:

Posture

- Keep your chin straight and slightly tucked.
- Keep your shoulders back and chest slightly out.
- Tilt your pelvis slightly forward.
- Do not lock your knees, which puts pressure on your lower back.
- Breathe from your diaphragm (belly), not your chest.



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Wide base of support

- When standing, legs can be kept one in front of the other or side-to-side. Use a “staggered stance.”
- Feet should be shoulder width apart, with equal weight on each foot.

Sitting

- Your weight should be evenly distributed in the chair.
- Choose a chair that lets both of your feet rest flat on the floor, while keeping your knees level with your hips. Use a stool if needed.
- Sit back in your chair. But do not lean back; your back should be straight up and down. If the chair does not support your lower back’s natural curve, place a small pillow or rolled towel behind your lower back.
- Lift the top of your head toward the ceiling, with your chin tucked in slightly. Keep your upper back and neck straight, but relaxed.
- Relax your shoulders. Do not lift them, round them, or pull them back.
- Do you sit for long periods? Get up every 30 minutes. Move around and stretch.

Sleeping

- You put 55 pounds of pressure on your back when you sleep on your back. A couple of pillows under your knees can cut the pressure in half.
- Lying on your side with a pillow between your knees also lowers the pressure.

Reaching

- Avoid reaching overhead, especially when reaching for heavier objects.
- Stand on a stool to reach things above your shoulder level.

Holding

- Always hold objects close to your body. Keep elbows close to your sides when holding an object. Hold objects close to your stomach.
- Face objects with your hips and shoulders properly aligned. Do not twist or hold one shoulder or hip higher than the other.



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Moving

- To move heavy items, push rather than pull. Use your arms and legs to start the push.

Lifting

If heavy lifting is part of your work or daily routine, proper training is a must. For others, here are some general tips:

- To lift something heavy, kneel down on one knee. Keep the other foot flat on the floor as close as you can to the item. Once set, place both feet on the floor. Then, with your head higher than your hips, lift with both legs, not your back.
- Keep the object close to your body at all times. Ask for help with a heavy load. Equally use both sides of your body to bear the weight.
- When lifting, try to use both hands when possible instead of one.
- It may be easier to carry two small objects, one in either hand, than one large one.

Reach and keep a healthy weight

- Being overweight puts added strain on your joints and muscles.

Get regular exercise and stretch the muscles used

- Exercise helps prevent aches and pains in many ways. It helps you reach and keep a healthy weight. It also keeps you strong and flexible, which prevents injury.
- For example, strong core muscles help support your lower back. Strong upper leg muscles help support your knees.
- Talk with your doctor and health coach about an exercise and stretching plan that is right for you.

Quit tobacco

- Nicotine restricts the flow of blood and oxygen to your muscles and joints. It also slows healing.
- Smokers are more prone to back pain and chronic pain than nonsmokers.



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Treatment

When to See Your Doctor

Talk with your doctor if:

- You have pain after a fall or injury.
- You have weakness, pain, or numbness in one or both legs or arms.
- The pain is severe and does not improve with medicine and rest.
- You have fever with no flu symptoms.
- You have trouble passing urine.
- You have lost 10 pounds or more without trying

Depending on the cause of your pain, your doctor may advise one or more of the treatments below.

The P.R.I.C.E of Relief

This eases short-term pain and inflammation at home.

- **P** = If you have joint pain, protect the joint with a wrap or brace. Caution: Your doctor may advise you to splint or tape the joint. Never keep a joint still for more than a few days without gently stretching it from time to time. This can cause it to become stiff or even frozen in place.
- **R** = Rest the area. Do not do any activity that makes the joint or muscle more painful.
- **I** = Ice the area for about 15 minutes, several times each day. Use a cold pack or ice wrapped in a damp towel. Or try a bag of frozen vegetables wrapped in a damp towel. Never apply ice directly to the skin.
- **C** = Compress the joint or muscle with an elastic wrap.
- **E** = Elevate the area above the level of your heart.

Do you have muscle spasms? Try applying a heating pad or wrap several times a day.



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Weight Loss

Overweight adds to the stress placed on your muscles and joints. Losing even a little weight can help. For example, every pound you lose takes four pounds of pressure off your knees.

To lose weight, eat fewer calories and be more active. Talk with your doctor and health coach about making a plan to lose weight and keep it off. UPMC has many resources to help you.

Physical Therapy

Physical therapy can help ease muscle and joint pain in many ways. It:

- Makes the area more stable
- Strengthens your muscles, including those that support your joints
- Increases your range of motion and function

Physical therapy may include:

- Moving the joints and muscles
- Heat or cold therapy
- Nerve stimulation
- Ultrasound
- Strengthening exercises
- A detailed home exercise program

Exercise

Talk with your doctor or physical therapist about exercises to help treat your pain. Follow any cautions carefully so that you do not cause more pain or injury. For example, always stretch after you are warmed up, not before.

Creams

- Capsaicin cream
 - Capsaicin is a substance found in chili peppers.
 - It blocks substance P, which helps transmit pain signals.
 - It also triggers the release of chemicals in the body that block pain.
- Methyl salicylate cream (such as Ben Gay)



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Injections for joint pain

- Steroid injections into the affected joint
 - These are most often used with people who have arthritis, joint disease, or inflammation.
 - Studies have not proven that they work to relieve joint pain.
 - Use with caution. They may mask an injury, and you could overuse the joint and cause more damage.
- Removing fluid from the joint (often done along with steroid injections)
- Injections of hyaluronan (a synthetic joint fluid)

Glucosamine and chondroitin supplements

- These are natural compounds found in healthy cartilage. Research supports their use for the treatment of osteoarthritis, especially of the knee.
- Using these may help you lower your dose of other medicines and reduce side effects.

Medicines

Acetaminophen (Tylenol)

- For mild pain without any swelling
- Use with caution. High doses, especially if you drink alcohol, can cause liver damage.
- Keep in mind that many other pain medicines contain acetaminophen. If you are not careful, you might take more than is safe.
- If you find you need more than two acetaminophen pills a day, tell your doctor.

Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)

- For moderate-to-severe pain with swelling
- Examples are aspirin, ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin), naproxen sodium (Aleve), and Cox-2 inhibitors (Celebrex).
- Ask your doctor if NSAIDs are right for you. They may cause serious side effects.
- Always take them with food or milk because they can cause stomach bruising or bleeding. When taken for a long time, they can cause kidney damage. They can also make blood pressure worse.
- Do not take NSAIDs with other medicines without talking to your doctor first.

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Muscle relaxants (if you have muscle spasms)

Drugs that treat depression or epilepsy

- Some of these drugs interfere with pain signals.
- Antidepressants in low doses can reduce pain, especially nerve pain and fibromyalgia.
- Cymbalta is an antidepressant approved for musculoskeletal pain. Examples of antidepressants that can reduce pain are Pamelor, Aventyl, Desyrel, Elavil, and Serzone.
- Anticonvulsants are used to prevent seizures. But they can also help with nerve pain. Examples of anticonvulsants are Gabitril, Tegretol, Neurontin, and Topamax.
- Drugs that treat depression or epilepsy can have serious side effects. Talk with your doctor about whether they are right for you.

Opioids

- For severe pain that does not respond to other treatments
- Examples include morphine, oxycodone, hydrocodone, and methadone.
- Talk with your doctor about side effects and the dangers of physical dependence and overdose.
- Take them only as directed. Never take them with alcohol or tranquilizers. Do not take them with other medicines without your doctor's okay.

Surgery

Talk with your doctor about surgery only as the last resort. Talk about lifestyle change as a possible first line of treatment.



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Take Action

1. If you have ongoing joint or muscle pain, have you seen your doctor? If not, set a goal to make an appointment as soon as you can.

I will call my doctor's office on _____ to make an appointment.

Note: Do you have back pain? Talk with your doctor and health coach about the special back pain programs at UPMC.

2. My doctor's appointment is on (date) _____ at (time) _____, at (place) _____.

3. After the appointment, write down your doctor's advice here:



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