

Live Your Life – Beyond Doubt

Just say NO to fears and worries.

Sometimes it might seem like everyone has some well-intentioned warning that raises fears about life with arthritis and its treatments. Even if you know they're probably wrong, it's hard not to become anxious – and maybe even take misguided advice.

“Fear is a very powerful motivator to do or not do something,” says M. Elaine Husni, MD, director of Cleveland Clinic’s Arthritis and Musculoskeletal Treatment Center and an Arthritis Foundation researcher.

It also can contribute to inflammation. To get the facts and calm some fears, we asked arthritis experts to set the record straight on a few common concerns.

FEAR: Exercise will hurt and make my arthritis worse.

FACT: Research shows low-impact exercise actually reduces pain and improves quality of life, says Dr. Husni. “Pain is protective. It should signal you to modify, but not stop, your exercise.” Find an activity that’s right for you. Water therapy or chair exercises might be a good starting place, she says.

FEAR: My meds are going to make me even sicker than my disease.

FACT: All drugs have side effects, but they affect people differently, Dr. Husni says. Your doctor prescribes particular medications because they can control your disease. For example, a biologic can slow rheumatoid arthritis progression, leading to possible remission and easing symptoms. And patients who fear taking methotrexate, which is also used to treat cancer, should understand that the



doses used to treat arthritis are much lower – as is the potential for side effects, says David S. Pisetsky, MD, PhD, chief of rheumatology at Duke University School of Medicine.

FEAR: Having sex may hurt my joints.

FACT: You don’t have to give up sex; you just have to find ways to make it more comfortable. In fact, studies show that intimacy with a partner releases the hormone oxytocin, which may reduce stress, improve mood and sleep, and help ease pain. “Choose the optimum time to take pain medication for best results, and enjoy a warm shower or bath first to relax,” says Victoria Ruffing, nurse manager of the Johns Hopkins Arthritis Center in Baltimore.

FEAR: I’ll have to give up activities I love.

FACT: Current therapies let many people with arthritis continue doing what they enjoy, says Dr. Pisetsky. Adjusting your activity level and focusing on what you really value will help you keep it up.

“I know people who’ve been treated successfully with medication who are back running regularly, including distance races,” he says. “That’s not everyone, but many patients on medications like biologics can effectively have a remission with a markedly decreased number of tender and swollen joints.” —STEPHANIE STEPHENS

➔ Read more about getting comfortable with intimacy at arthritis.org/ArthritisTodayMJ14.