





Surgery for That Bad Knee? Maybe Not

Ways to get your
aching joints
better through
exercise and diet

More than 1 million people undergo joint replacement surgery each year in the United States, according to the National Institutes of Health.

The ever-improving implants are a welcome medical advancement, keeping

Americans active longer and staving off the crippling effects of arthritis.

But given the choice of surgical implant or saving your own joint, what would you do?

Pat Jaworoski, 64, of Bonita Springs, to no surprise, picked the latter. Five years ago, her orthopedist examined her aching knees and told her they were arthritic. They weren't "bone-on-bone" yet, Jaworoski recalls, but the orthopedist said she might eventually be a candidate for knee replacement surgery.

Not so fast, Jaworoski decided. As a staffing specialist for NCH Healthcare System, Jaworoski knew Suzanne Graziano, R.N., M.S.N., the system's nursing director for 5 South Orthopedics and Brookdale Center for Healthy Aging & Rehabilitation. Graziano, an expert on musculoskeletal health, coaches NCH patients on how to protect, preserve and improve their joints.

"It's baby steps, little steps, that change a body over time," Graziano counsels.

Jaworoski, admittedly, had many steps to take. So did her husband, Edward, who had been diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes around the same time. And in the course of his treatment, she discovered she was pre-diabetic.

"We ate too much of the good stuff," Jaworoski says.

The couple re-educated themselves on nutrition, portion control and glucose levels, and incorporated exercise into their daily routines. Pat Jaworoski combined good nutrition and lifestyle changes with occasional medical interventions—two rounds of injections, five years apart, to rejuvenate the synovial fluid in her knees.



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**Pat Jaworoski's
lifestyle change
helped correct
much more than her
arthritis knees.**

Erik Kellar

The result: Jaworoski is 42 pounds lighter. Her triglyceride levels, a measure of fat in the cells, fell from a dangerous 237 to a healthy 121, and she's no longer considered pre-diabetic. And her knees have stabilized, thwarting the need for surgery.

"It's a total lifestyle change, though. You have to prepare," Jaworoski says. Her husband, by the way, dropped 52 pounds and is no longer diabetic.

Graziano loves stories like Jaworoski's. Want to add yours to her collection? Here are Graziano's tips for joint health:

1. Cross train. Golfers and tennis players, for example, wear out their joints with repetitive motions. Graziano suggests adding whole-body exercises such as yoga, Pilates and weight training. "You need to better balance out the body," she says.

2. Let yourself heal. Arthritis can flare from injuries sustained years before. Throw out old the "no pain, no gain" philosophy, Graziano advises. Replace it with the RICE treatment plan—rest, ice, compression, elevation. Pushing your body before it has time

to recuperate may get you back on the playing field now, but it could land you on the operating room table later.

3. Drop pounds. Excessive weight strains the joints. Cut calories, especially empty ones like those in nutritionally devoid snack foods, if you need to lose weight.

4. Use food as medicine. In your balanced diet, incorporate anti-inflammatory foods such as berries (see sidebar), avocados, green leafy vegetables, papaya, pineapple and fig. Also helpful are foods with essential fatty acids, such as cold-water fish (i.e. salmon), nuts, nut butters and flax seed. Avoid foods that trigger inflammation: fried foods, red meat, dairy products and anything with trans fats.

5. Ditch the diet soda. That is Aspartame, the commonly used artificial sweetener, is known to cause joint pain; harm the synovial fluid that lubricates the joints; damage nerve cells; and cause bloating, migraines and a host of other problems. Graziano reports that many patients have noticed an improvement in their overall health just from

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eliminating the use of diet sodas.

6. Drink up. Water lubricates the joints, and most people don't drink enough of it. To learn how much you ought to drink each day, Graziano recommends the fluid calculator found at this link: www.nutrition.about.com/library/blwatercalculator.htm

7. Consider supplements. Graziano suggests several over-the-counter products: Zylamend, an herbal anti-inflammatory blend; omega-3 supplements to lubricate joints; and calcium/magnesium/vitamin D for those who have been diagnosed with osteopenia or osteoporosis. Also potentially helpful as anti-inflammatory pain relievers are papain, a papaya derivative, and bromelain, an enzyme found in pineapple. Graziano says people who have tried these nutritional supplements, formulated from food and organic in nature (not synthetically made), have reported good results. Please note that the FDA does not evaluate supplements for effectiveness the way it does drugs. You should discuss supplements and medications with your healthcare provider.

8. Exercise! If achy joints keep you from exercising, try swimming or water aerobics. The water takes the strain off the joints. Biking, too, may be less taxing than walking or jogging. Graziano also likes Eastern practices such as tai chi and yoga for their gentle, flowing movements. And don't let disability dissuade you from exercise—a good therapist can design chair or floor exercises for those unable to perform upright movements. Work toward exercising at least 30 minutes a day, five days a week.

Graziano also says not to be shy about asking for help. The NCH Healthcare System provides trainers, physical therapists and nutritionists who can help you make those lifestyle changes—and stick to them.

"It was just unbelievable," Jaworoski says of the changes she has made. "I've been heavy all my life, and I just couldn't get it off. Now it's off and it's stayed off."

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Drinks for Healthy Joints

Suzanne Graziano, the NCH nursing director for 5 South Orthopedics and Brookdale Center for Healthy Aging & Rehabilitation, offers two of her favorite recipes for joint health. The foods in these 24-ounce smoothies are known for their anti-inflammatory properties. Use organic ingredients whenever possible.

Vegan Green Smoothie

Promotes joint health and overall immunity

- Handful of spinach
- Handful of kale
- 1 banana
- 2 to 4 frozen strawberries
- 10 frozen blueberries
- 1 apple, cored and diced
- 1 celery stalk, diced
- ½ tablespoon chia seeds
- 8 to 10 ounces water
- Several ice cubes

Blend all ingredients on high speed and enjoy!

Tropical Smoothie

Quells ailments such as arthritis and tendonitis

- ½ cup pineapple
- ½ cup mango
- ½ cup papaya
- 1 cup coconut water
- 1 cup water
- Handful of ice cubes

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creation of substances known as "free radicals," which are unstable, very reactive molecules that can damage cell DNA and various body tissues. Eating fresh berries daily can help the body fight off these free radicals and maintain joint integrity.

Blackberries

Blackberries are rich in Vitamin C, E, B3 and folate and contain the minerals manganese and iron. They improve iron absorption; increase energy release from foods; enhance fat metabolism and oxygen transport to the tissues; support liver function; help regulate blood cholesterol levels; speed up wound healing; and protect against heart disease and cancer.



Eating fresh berries daily can help the body fight off free radicals and maintain joint integrity.

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Raspberries

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Raspberries enhance wound healing;
boost the body's energy levels;
protect against heart disease, cancer and arthritis; and encourage protein and fat metabolism.

Strawberries

Strawberries are rich in Vitamins C, B3 and B5. They promote wound healing; protect against macular degeneration; encourage iron absorption; and reduce blood fat levels and high blood pressure. They also improve health of skin and mucous membranes. **NH**

—Source: Suzanne Graziano, R.N., M.S.N.

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