

HEALTH

7 Age-Related Pains and How to Ease Them

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Got aches? You're in good company. Around 100 million Americans have some sort of chronic pain, meaning the long-term kind that sticks around after an injury or illness. And millions more have from short-term (acute) pain.

Some types are more common during certain times of your life. "Knowing that may help you be ready for them, and sometimes even avoid irritation or injury in the first place," says Jonathan L. Clashow, MD, chief of sports medicine at Mount Sinai Medical Center in New York City.

Here are seven types of pain you need to know about and tips to manage them.

1. Lower Back Pain

It's the most common type of chronic pain in America.

"If you're under 50 and haven't had a back injury, your back pain is likely the result of sitting for long stretches. That puts too much pressure on the discs in your back," says Robert Fay, PT, owner of Armonk Physical Therapy and Sports Training in New York.

Older adults, on the other hand, are more likely to have back pain from conditions like arthritis, Fay says.

It's most likely to strike during your 30s and 40s, but it can happen at any age.

Ease the ache: Strength-training and cardio exercise are both helpful. "They increase blood flow, and help you build your core muscles, which support your spine. And that reduces pressure," Fay says. Start slow and see a pro if you're not sure what exercises to do.

Physical therapy is another option. Your therapist can show you exercises that may help you move better and relieve pain. Over-the-counter medicines like acetaminophen and ibuprofen may also help, though you shouldn't use them for more than a few days without your doctor's OK.

Some people find using a heating pad

eases pain, too.

Call your doctor if you have severe back pain or if you've been hurting for more than a week.

2. Headaches

Regular ones and migraines — a type of headache that may cause other symptoms, like nausea — are the second most common type of chronic pain.

Experts aren't sure exactly what causes them, but "they can be triggered by things like muscle tension, dehydration, your period, stress, weather changes, and certain foods, like chocolate," says Jacob Teitelbaum, MD, author of *Pain Free 1-2-3*.

Most likely to strike: Between your 20s and 50s.

Ease the ache: If your headache is just in your forehead and temple area, it could be a tension headache. It might help to massage the area that hurts or apply menthol cream on your forehead or the base of your neck, Teitelbaum says.

Pain meds like acetaminophen, ibuprofen, or a medicine especially for migraines that contains caffeine, acetaminophen, or aspirin, can offer relief — but don't take it for more than 3 days without talking to your doctor. Your doctor might also recommend prescription migraine medicine.

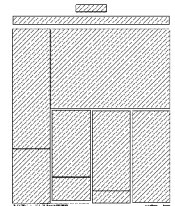
3. Osteoarthritis (OA)

This common condition happens when the protective cartilage between your joint and bone breaks down, causing pain in those joints, like hands, knees, and hips. "Osteoarthritis is often the result of age-related changes, or an injury or wear-and-tear from a sport or another activity," Fay says.

Most likely to strike: During your 60s and 70s. Thirty-three percent of adults over age 60 have OA.

Ease the ache: Staying physically active is key. "It keeps blood circulating, which can keep your joints healthy and reduce pain. And it strengthens the muscles around the joint, taking pressure off the joint and bone," Fay says.

If you're new to exercise or have severe



arthritis, talk to your doctor first. Another treatment option? Some people find relief by applying heat when their joints are stiff, and ice when they're swollen. Medicines that you take by mouth or put directly on your skin may also help. Talk to your doctor. He may suggest over-the-counter or prescription pain medicine.

4. Non-Arthritis Joint Pain

Pain that feels like it's in or around the joints — and that isn't the result of OA — is usually tendonitis, says Clashow. "That's an inflammation of the tendon, which is a band of tissue that connects your muscles to your bones," he explains. (With arthritis, it's usually tough or painful to get moving. With tendonitis, the more you move, the more pain you have.) It's often caused by activities that involve repetitive motion, like golfing and shoveling.

Most likely to strike: Over age 40. As you get older, your tendons become less elastic and are more prone to injury.

Ease the ache: Use RICE, which stands for rest, ice, compression, and elevation. Take a break from activities that aggravate your joint. Put an ice pack on the sore area. Wrap it in a bandage, and prop up the area (for example, put your leg on a pillow or two if your knee hurts). Take an NSAID — a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medicine, like ibuprofen or naproxen — to ease inflammation. Talk to your doctor if you're not improving after a week.

5. Pelvic Pain

One in seven women between the ages of 18 and 50 gets chronic pelvic pain. It can feel sharp or like a dull ache. It's pain that's not caused by your period. It may be the result of another condition, like endometriosis or IBS (irritable bowel syndrome).

Most likely to strike: Between the ages of 18 and 50.

Ease the ache: Over-the-counter pain medicines can help. But call your doctor if you have below-the-belt pain that lasts more than a few days. "Don't wait until it gets unbearable," says Deborah Clements, MD, a family medicine doctor at Northwestern Medicine in Illinois.

The treatment you need depends on the cause of your pelvic pain. It may include physical therapy, and prescription painkillers, or muscle relaxing medicine.

6. Carpal Tunnel

This condition happens when a nerve that runs from your arm to your palm becomes pressed or squeezed. It causes pain in your fingers and wrist, and numbness or tingling, too. It's often caused by repetitive motion (for example, from typing or using machinery). But other things, like a family history of carpal tunnel syndrome, arthritis and menopause-related hormone changes, also up your odds of getting it.

Most likely to strike: During your mid-40s to mid-60s.

Ease the ache: Talk to your doctor if you think you have this condition. He may suggest exercise, occupational and physical therapy, and short-term use of over-the-counter pain relievers. But in some cases, surgery is the best way to treat carpal tunnel syndrome.

7. Muscle Strain or Pain

"As you begin to age, your muscle fibers become less dense, which makes them less flexible and more prone to injury and soreness," Clements says. That can raise the odds of having soreness after activities you used to do with no problem, like gardening or exercise.

Most likely to strike: You're more likely to get a muscle strain with every passing decade.

