

7 Ways to Fight Midlife Pain

As **baby boomers** enter **middle age** and beyond, many of them struggle with mild to intense physical agony caused by **bone degeneration**. Whether this degeneration is due to swelling of the tissues that line the **joints**, **muscle strain**, or **fatigue**, the joints, muscles, bones and tendons break down too soon for 1 out of every 4 American midlifers.

The **joint problems** they experience can initiate changes in both body and mind that ultimately affect the spirit. Joint problems cause **mental stress** as well, which increases the release of adrenaline. Ultimately, excess adrenaline leads to exhaustion.

Then **depression** sets in because serotonin levels drop when the action of “feel good” brain chemicals is hindered. Sleep is disrupted by the pain, tension and exhaustion, further inhibiting the body’s ability to release natural mood elevators known as endorphins.

In an effort to break the cycle of pain so they can carry on with their daily responsibilities, midlifers often use over-the-counter or prescription medications. They spend billions of dollars on NSAIDs (nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs), aspirin, acetaminophen, ibuprofen and Cyclooxygenase-2 (COX2) inhibitors.

Boomers are usually too busy, too stressed, and too tired to actively take care of their muscles and joints. They believe they have to live with this “inevitable” part of midlife. A friend recently told me that these days his back goes out more than he does!

Can midlifers find relief from the pain and suffering that affects their bodies and minds—without taking medications that have negative side effects?

Absolutely! But they must become active participants in their own recovery through the use of natural therapies.

Some nutritional approaches are highly effective. In fact, there is hope that natural substances will someday revolutionize the treatment and management of arthritic disease. They may even help the body rebuild functioning joints.

- **Willow bark** is rich in salicin and salicylates that metabolize into salicylic acid. Salicylic acid, the base of aspirin, was first prepared from willow bark in the late 1930s. Willow bark has fewer side effects than aspirin and has a long tradition of use in Europe. It has an anti-inflammatory effect.
- **Fish oil** helps regulate inflammation. Omega-3 oils (EPA and DHA) and flaxseed oil suppress inflammation especially well in rheumatoid arthritis (RA) patients. Publications from around the world now confirm that omega-3 oils are effective in relieving morning stiffness and the tender joints associated with RA. In some instances omega-3 oil actually eliminated the need for NSAIDs. Further, fish oil and low-dose aspirin taken together have been found to have better effects on inflammation than either substance alone.
- **Chondroitin sulfate** is a major component of cartilage that reduces pain while increasing range of motion with long-term use.
- **Glucosamine** alone or in combination with chondroitin sulfate is becoming the treatment of choice for osteoarthritis (OA). It has the ability to repair and improve joint function in addition to providing pain relief. Most important of all, it offers no dangerous side effects.
- **Vitamin E** is a powerful antioxidant that has been reported to diminish pain. Free-radical damage is a factor in the development of OA and RA patients.

- **GLA (gamma-linoleic acid)** is a fatty acid that has been used to suppress chronic inflammation. Dietary sources include black walnut seed oil, evening primrose oil and borage oil.
- **Nettle leaf** has a long history of use as a safe remedy for arthritis in Germany. It is a natural COX2 inhibitor, which means it suppresses the pro-inflammatory enzyme known as Cyclooxygenase-2.
- **Ginger root** (not to be confused with wild ginger, which can be hazardous) is a powerful herb that possesses anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties. It has been used for thousands of years in China for rheumatism, stomach distress and nausea.

Natural therapies can be effective for the midlife pain that comes with arthritis. They should be tried first, in my opinion, because they can provide relief from pain and inflammation without the negative side effects common to NSAIDs.

Janet Maccaro, Ph.D, CNC, is a respected lecturer and the author of several books on health and nutrition, including *100 Answers to 100 Questions about How to Live Longer*.