

# A DISEASE PROCESS MODULE: UNDERSTANDING ARTHRITIS



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*A Disease Process Module:*  
**UNDERSTANDING ARTHRITIS**

We hope you enjoy this inservice, prepared by registered nurses especially for caregivers like you!

## Instructions for the Learner

*If you are studying the inservice on your own, please do the following:*

- Read through **all** the material. You may find it useful to have a highlighting marker nearby as you read. Highlight any information that is new to you or that you feel is especially important.
- If you have questions about anything you read, please ask your supervisor.
- Take the quiz. Think about each statement and pick the best answer.
- Check with your supervisor for the right answers. You need **8 correct** to pass!
- Print your name, write in the date, and then sign your name.
- Email In the Know at [feedback@knowingmore.com](mailto:feedback@knowingmore.com) with your comments and/or suggestions for improving this inservice.

**THANK YOU!**

**After finishing this inservice, you will be able to:**

*Describe the anatomy of a moveable joint.*



*Discuss at least two of the most common types of arthritis.*



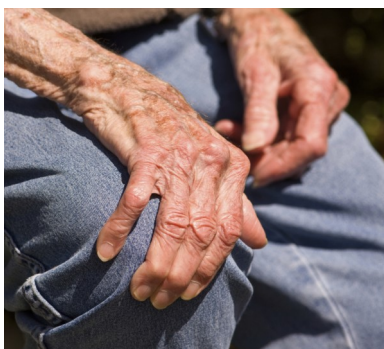
*List the possible causes of arthritis.*



*Name at least four ways that arthritis is treated.*



*Perform practical and helpful care to clients who suffer from arthritis.*



## Inside This Inservice:

Anatomy of a Joint	2
Six Types of Arthritis	3-6
Diagnosis & Treatment	7
Common Medications	8
Diet & Exercise	9
Joint Protection	10
Final Tips!	11

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## A Disease Process Module: Understanding Arthritis

### MANAGING MARGARET'S ARTHRITIS

When Margaret turned 50, she went to the doctor because she "hurt all over." She was diagnosed with arthritis and decided to retire early from her job as a checker at a local grocery store.

Now at age 69, Margaret says, "Everything I do seems to hurt."

- Her left knee and hip do not bend all the way.
- Her hands get swollen and do not close. When her hands are swollen, simple tasks like washing the dishes are painful and opening her medication bottle is unmanageable.
- She can no longer cook for herself because cutting and chopping cause pain and opening a jar is impossible.
- Margaret is embarrassed to call her friends or family because holding a phone for more than a few minutes makes her hand, elbow and shoulder feel stiff and sore—and she doesn't want them to find out.
- She had to cut her hair short because blow drying her longer hair became too painful and exhausting.
- It hurts Margaret to stand for even 30 minutes because her back, knees and hips begin to hurt. She can't kneel to wash her floors and she can no longer take care of the beautiful roses in her front yard.



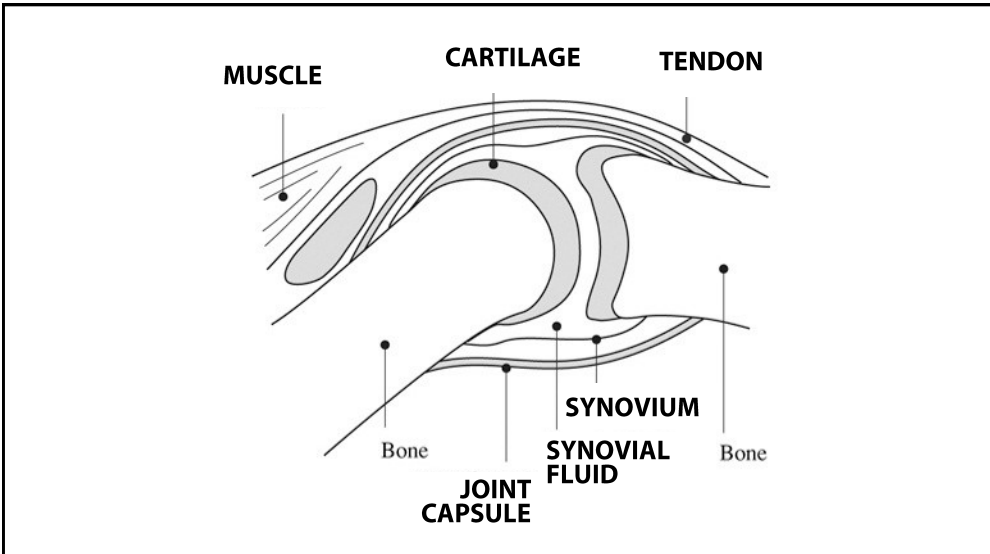
Unfortunately, Margaret's case is not unique. Arthritis sufferers often live in chronic pain that interferes with activities of daily living and their quality of life.

- **An estimated 46 million adults in the United States have some form of arthritis. And, it is estimated that at least half of all adults over age 65 suffer from arthritis pain.**

Keep reading to learn more about arthritis and how you can help clients like Margaret who are dealing with the pain and other symptoms of arthritis.

You might also pick up some tips for protecting your own joints . . . to help you avoid and/or manage the pain of arthritis as you get older.

## TAKE A LOOK INSIDE A JOINT



### WHAT HAPPENS WHEN JOINTS WEAR OUT?

*When the cartilage in a joint wears down, tiny pieces break off. These little pieces cause the joint to become inflamed, so it produces extra joint fluid—leading to a painful, swollen joint.*

***It's true that a joint is the place where two bones meet, but a joint involves more than just bones. Most joints in the body are moveable and consist of:***

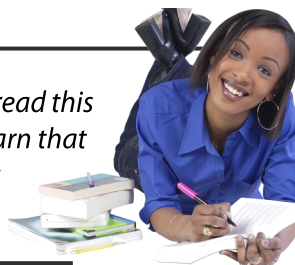
- **CARTILAGE**—This is the white, shiny material on the ends of bones. Cartilage allows bones to glide *smoothly* against each other so that it doesn't hurt to move a joint.
- **SYNOVIUM**—This tissue lines the joint and seals it into its own little capsule.
- **SYNOVIAL FLUID**—This is the clear, sticky fluid *inside* a joint. It is produced by the synovial membrane and is the consistency of oil. The synovial fluid lubricates the joint and provides nourishment and oxygen to cartilage cells.
- **LIGAMENTS**—These tough, elastic bands of connective tissue surround a joint to give it support and to keep it from bending too far the wrong way.
- **TENDONS**—Similar to ligaments, tendons are tough cords of connective tissue. Tendons attach to muscles on each side of a joint and help control the movement of the joint.
- **BURSAS**—These are fluid-filled sacs that sit between bones and ligaments. Each bursa acts like a cushion and prevents excess friction in a joint.

- When the cartilage becomes too damaged, the ends of the bone begin to rub together.
- Sometimes, the bone under the damaged cartilage begins to disintegrate.
- With some types of arthritis, the joint fills up with scar tissue. With other types, the ends of the bones thicken and form growths called "bone spurs".
- As a joint becomes more diseased, the bones may not line up right, causing the joint to be deformed.

*When a joint is painful, people tend to favor it by not moving it. This causes the muscles around the joint to weaken and shrink. These weak muscles won't give the joint proper support—causing more pain!*

## WHAT'S NEW?

Grab your favorite highlighter! As you read this inservice, **highlight five things** you learn that you didn't know before. Share this new information with your co-workers!





## WHAT EXCITES YOU?

### GET INVOLVED!

Right now, there is no cure for arthritis. But, researchers and advocates at the Arthritis Foundation are working hard to make a difference in the lives of those who suffer.

You can help too! Visit [www.arthritis.org](http://www.arthritis.org) and click on "Events and Programs." Here you will find a list of all the fun things people are doing to raise money and awareness. For example, there is:

- The Arthritis Walk
- The Jingle Bell Run/Walk
- The Bone Bash
- Joints in Motion
- Dinners & Galas

**Choose an event and get involved today!**

# SIX COMMON TYPES OF ARTHRITIS

## 1. OSTEOARTHRITIS

Osteoarthritis is also known as degenerative joint disease. You might see it called OA or DJD, for short. It is one of the most common types of arthritis. It is considered a **progressive** disease because it gets worse, slowly, over a number of years.

### *What Happens?*

- With osteoarthritis, the cartilage in the joints breaks down slowly over time. After a while, the bones rub against each other which leads to pain and loss of movement in the joint.
- OA occurs most often in the hands, knees, hips, ankles and other weight-bearing joints.

### *What are the symptoms?*

The symptoms of osteoarthritis are different from person to person, but usually include:

- Loss of movement.
- Pain with movement . . . and sometimes even at rest.
- Stiffness and swelling of the joints, especially in the morning.
- Joint abnormalities like bone spurs, deformities and weakness.

### *How you can help.*

- Encourage your client with osteoarthritis to take pain medications exactly as prescribed.
- Recommend a warm bath for overall painful joints. This may be especially helpful the first thing in the morning.
- A warm hand soak or warm compress may be helpful for painful joints in the hand.
- Report to your supervisor if your client is unable to relieve pain with the current plan of care.
- Encourage clients to perform as much self-care as their mobility allows.
- Help immobile client to change positions at least once every two hours.
- Assist with active or passive range of motion exercises if ordered in the care plan.
- Check crutches, cane, braces, or walker for proper fit.



## SIX COMMON TYPES OF ARTHRITIS, *CONTINUED*

### 2. RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS

Rheumatoid arthritis, known as RA for short, is an autoimmune disorder. This means that the immune system of people with RA is out of whack. Instead of just fighting off bacteria and viruses, the immune system begins to attack healthy joint tissue. This causes the joints to become inflamed and damaged.

In most cases, RA is chronic, although it alternates between painful flare-ups and disease-free remissions.

#### ***What Happens?***

RA causes inflammation in the lining of the joints. Typically, a number of different joints are affected—on both sides of the body.

#### ***What are the symptoms?***

Rheumatoid arthritis affects the entire body, so along with swelling and redness of the joints, some people have the following symptoms:



- Loss of appetite and weight loss.
- Fever.
- Loss of energy.
- Anemia.
- Lumps of tissue (nodules) under the skin.
- Deformities in joints. For example, fingers tend to move away from the thumb and may become permanently bent.

#### ***How you can help.***

- Recommend a hard mattress with a small pillow. A soft mattress with pillows that are too large prevents good body positioning and places stress on joints.
- Offer massages and warm baths to promote relaxation and decrease pain.
- Monitor and report any signs of new pain, stiffness or swelling right away so treatment can be adjusted.
- Assist with range of motion exercises as ordered. However, passive range of motion should not be done on joints that are swollen.
- When doing passive range of motion, be sure to support the limb above *and* below the joint to avoid muscle strain. Go through the movement smoothly and slowly.
- Encourage REST during flare-ups.



## THE NEXT STEP!

### ASSISTIVE DEVICES

Arthritis can make daily activities challenging, but a number of assistive devices are available that can make those tasks easier.

For example, there are:

- Long, flexible shoehorns to help pull on shoes without bending over.
- Sock pulling aids.
- Zipper and button pullers.
- Easy-grip toenail clippers.
- Doorknob adapters, (turns doorknob into a handle that only has to be pushed down on to open).
- Touch lamps.
- Writing aids.
- Key turners.

***Visit [aidsforarthritis.com](http://aidsforarthritis.com) for a complete list and descriptions of all the assistive devices available to help arthritis sufferers.***

## SIX COMMON TYPES OF ARTHRITIS, *CONTINUED*

### 3. FIBROMYALGIA

Fibromyalgia is a chronic arthritis-related condition that leads to overall body pain, fatigue, and tenderness in localized areas.

No one is sure what causes it but some experts think that hormonal disturbances and chemical imbalances are involved. Other believe it is linked to stress, illness, or trauma. Still others think it may be hereditary.

#### ***What Happens?***

Fibromyalgia causes pain in muscles, ligaments and tendons—not joints. In fact, the symptoms of fibromyalgia do not include swollen joints at all.

#### ***What are the symptoms?***

To diagnose fibromyalgia, doctors check 18 specific areas on the body to see if they are tender. To be diagnosed, a person must be tender in at least 11 of these sites.

In addition to these tender spots, symptoms include:

- Fatigue.
- Mood changes, including depression.
- Headaches.
- Problems concentrating.
- Numbness in the arms and legs.

#### ***How you can help.***

- Massage, combined with alternating heat and cold applications can soothe tense, sore muscles and increase circulation.
- Gentle stretching, like with Yoga or Tai-chi can help prevent muscle stiffness and weakness.
- Help clients with fibromyalgia limit intake of sugar, caffeine and alcohol. These irritate muscles.
- Encourage clients with fibromyalgia to deal with stress. Meditation, imagery or deep breathing exercises may be helpful.



### 4. GOUT

Gout is a kind of arthritis that causes a sudden burning pain, stiffness, and swelling in a joint. The pain comes on suddenly and is very intense.



For some reason, the joint most often affected by gout is the big toe. You might also see gout in the knee, ankle, wrist or elbow.

#### ***What Happens?***

Gout occurs when there is a build up of needle-like crystals in a joint. These crystals come from excess uric acid in the body.

#### ***What are the symptoms?***

The symptoms of gout may include:

- Severe pain in the affected joint.
- Shiny, purplish skin around the joint.
- Hard lumps of crystals just under the skin. These lumps tend to develop in the outer edge of the ear, near the elbow, over the fingers or toes or around the heel.

#### ***How you can help.***

- Report right away if you notice an attack of gout coming on. Your client may need to take an anti-inflammatory or may need a dose of cortisone.
- A person with gout should never take aspirin. This increases uric acid.
- Remind you client with gout to avoid eating too much meat or drinking too much alcohol. These substances increase the amount of uric acid in the body.



- A “cradle,” “foot board” or “blanket bar” may be needed to keep the weight of blankets off the feet or other swollen joints while the person is in bed. (See example in photo to the left.)

## SIX COMMON TYPES OF ARTHRITIS, *CONTINUED*

### 5. PSORIATIC ARTHRITIS

Psoriatic (pronounced “sore-ee-at-ic”) arthritis (PsA, for short) is a form of arthritis that affects some people who have psoriasis — a condition that features red patches of skin topped with silvery scales.

About 10 percent of people with psoriasis will develop psoriatic arthritis.

#### ***What Happens?***

Psoriatic arthritis happens when the body's immune system begins to attack healthy cells and tissue. The abnormal immune response causes inflammation in the joints (the pain) as well as overproduction of skin cells (the scaly rash).

#### ***What are the symptoms?***

The signs and symptoms of psoriatic arthritis are similar to those of rheumatoid arthritis. Both diseases cause joints to become painful, swollen and warm to the touch. However, psoriatic arthritis also causes:

- Painful, sausage-like swelling of fingers and toes.
- Foot pain, especially at the back of the heel and the sole of the foot.
- Intense lower back pain.

#### ***How you can help.***

- During a flare-up of inflammation, the client should REST. Special wrist splints, footwear, gentle massage or applying heat may also help.
- Check to see that your clients with foot pain have good shoes. The shoes should be well fitting, rubber soled and flexible.
- Help your client follow recommendations for “joint protection.” See guidelines on page 10.
- When not in pain, encourage your clients with PsA to get some kind of exercise every day and to maintain a healthy weight.



### 6. LYME DISEASE

Lyme disease is a bacterial illness spread by the bite of a deer tick. Deer ticks, feed on the blood of animals and humans and spread the bacteria when feeding.

Deer ticks are brown and about the size of the head of a pin, which can make them difficult to see or feel.



#### ***What Happens?***

If the tick feeds long enough on the human, it can transmit the bacteria. When the bacteria enters the bloodstream it usually causes a large, red, circular rash, known as a “bulls eye” rash.

If treated with appropriate antibiotics in the early stages of the disease, complete recovery is possible.

Left untreated, Lyme disease can cause chronic joint inflammation (known as Lyme arthritis), particularly of the knee.

#### ***What are the symptoms?***

The symptoms of Lyme Disease include:

- Rash (can occur a few days to a month before any other symptoms appear).
- Flu-like symptoms.
- Joint pain.

#### ***How you can help.***

- If you notice a tick on your client's skin, use tweezers to gently grasp the tick near its head or mouth. Don't squeeze or crush the tick, but pull carefully and steadily. Once you've removed the entire tick, notify your supervisor right away.
- If you know your client has been bitten by a tick, or if you see the bulls-eye rash, report the symptoms immediately so antibiotics can be started.
- If your client suffers from chronic joint pain from Lyme arthritis, then follow the recommendations for osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis.

# DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT

## Doctors diagnose arthritis by:

- Talking with patients about their symptoms.
- Examining people, including watching them walk and move.
- Taking X-rays so that they can see inside a joint. This lets them know the condition of the cartilage.
- Using a CAT scan or MRI machine to take images of joints.
- Performing blood tests to help them know which type of arthritis is causing the problem.
- Taking fluid from inside a swollen joint.

## Doctors treat arthritis by prescribing or suggesting a combination of:

- Medications
- Pain Management
- Nutrition
- Exercise
- Physical and Occupational Therapy
- Surgery
- Alternative Therapies (such as acupuncture)

# HOW IS PAIN MANAGED?

**Remember that the pain experienced by people with arthritis may be caused or made worse by:**

- Inflammation.
- Pressure on a joint.
- Fatigue.
- Depression.

## So, managing pain usually involves:

- **MEDICATIONS**—Doctors prescribe drugs to help reduce inflammation and relieve pain.
- **COMFORT MEASURES**—Items like special mattresses, splints and cushions help prevent pressure on sore joints. In addition, techniques like relaxation therapy, deep breathing and meditation provide comfort to people in pain.
- **REST**—People with arthritis need to balance the amount of activity and exercise in their day with plenty of rest. This helps prevent fatigue and overuse of sensitive joints.
- **COPING MEASURES**—Finding ways to maintain a positive attitude are very important to people who must live with a chronic condition like arthritis.



## THINK ABOUT IT!

### HELP MARGARET

Think about Margaret, from the beginning of this inservice.

- **How can you help Margaret manage her pain?**

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- **How can you help Margaret be more independent? For example, can you think of a way to make opening pill bottles easier, or is there a way you can help her talk on the phone?**

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- **What assistive devices do you think Margaret needs?**

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## GET OUT!

### THINK OUTSIDE OF THE BOX!

*Working with clients in the home often requires coming up with creative solutions to uncommon problems.*

- **THE PROBLEM:** You are caring for Margaret, the woman from the beginning of this inservice. After completing the “Think About It” activity on page 7, you determine that Margaret would benefit from the use of several assistive devices.
- The problem is that her insurance won’t cover the cost, and she doesn’t have enough money to afford these items on her own.
- **WHAT YOU KNOW:** You know Margaret would be more independent and happier with these items.
- **GET CREATIVE:** What will you do? Think of three creative solutions. Consider “making” something yourself!
- **TALK ABOUT IT:** Share your ideas with your co-workers and supervisor and find out how they would solve this problem.

## COMMON MEDICATIONS FOR ARTHRITIS AND THEIR SIDE EFFECTS

The type of arthritis medication prescribed for your client depends on the type of arthritis they have. Each medication has different side effects that you should keep in mind:

- **NSAIDs**—These are non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs such as aspirin or ibuprofen.
  - Common side effects include stomach upset, indigestion and diarrhea.
- **COX-2 INHIBITORS**—Celebrex is a commonly prescribed COX-2 inhibitor. These drugs also help with the pain and inflammation of arthritis.
  - They may cause stomach upset, especially if mixed with alcoholic beverages.
- **CHEMOTHERAPY**—Certain medications that were originally developed for cancer patients can be used to treat arthritis. One example is methotrexate.
  - People who take this medication may experience mouth ulcers, nausea and vomiting.
- **STEROIDS**—One commonly known steroid medication is prednisone.
  - Possible side effects include upset stomach, bloating, increased appetite and weight gain.
- **NARCOTIC ANALGESICS**—Some people require narcotic medications to manage the acute pain of an arthritis flare-up.
  - The possible side effects of narcotics include drowsiness, dizziness, nausea, dry mouth and constipation.
- **BIOLOGIC RESPONSE MODIFIERS**—An example of this type of medication is Etanercept. This drug is given as a twice-weekly injection.
  - Side effects are minimal, but you might notice some redness and swelling at the injection site.



## EATING RIGHT WITH ARTHRITIS

***Unfortunately, arthritis symptoms cannot be relieved simply by eating a special diet. However, it's important to keep in mind that:***

Any chronic disease—including arthritis—places extra demands on the body. It's important for your clients to eat a *balanced* diet.

Some of your clients may need extra calories to give them the necessary energy required to live with arthritis. But other clients may need to watch their calories.

Regardless of the type of arthritis, extra weight puts additional stress on diseased joints—especially weight-bearing joints like the hips, knees and ankles.

**Studies have shown that losing as little as eleven pounds can reduce someone's risk of developing OA of the knee by 50%!**

There are many theories about certain foods being helpful to arthritis sufferers. These include fish oil, green lipped mussels, ginger and garlic. However, scientists have not been able to prove that any certain food relieves arthritis symptoms.

***The best bet for your clients with arthritis is to:***

- Eat a variety of healthy foods from all the food groups.
- Stay away from high fat and high cholesterol foods.
- Avoid eating too many sugary foods.
- Drink alcohol only moderately.
- Maintain a healthy weight.

## EXERCISING WITH ARTHRITIS

***Clients experiencing arthritis pain may try to avoid exercise, thinking that their pain will increase if they move around. However, if they don't exercise their joints, the pain will only get worse.***

- Medications help reduce arthritis pain and inflammation, but only exercise can keep a joint moving the way it should. Range of motion exercises increase flexibility while strengthening exercises help build muscles.
- Range of motion exercises help stretch joints to keep them flexible. They also prevent stiffness and joint deformities.
- Strengthening exercises increase the support around a joint by making muscles, ligaments and tendons stronger.

***How Can You Help?***

- Look for ways to help every client get some daily exercise.
- A therapist may develop exercise plans for your clients. You can help by learning the exercises and doing them along with the client.



# TALK ABOUT IT!

**DOUBLE CHECK!**

Are you 100 percent sure you know how to help your clients with arthritis to exercise, move, or use assistive devices? ***If not, you should just ask!***

Depending on the exercise or assistive device, you may need to talk to a physical therapist, occupational therapist, nurse or even a recreational therapist.

**Here are some questions you may ask:**

- My client has a \_\_\_\_\_. Can you please explain to me how it works and how I can best help my client use it?
- Would you please give me a demonstration on how my client is supposed to do her daily exercises? I want to make sure she is doing them properly.

***Share what you learn with your co-workers and supervisor!***



## FIVE KEY POINTS!

### REVIEW WHAT YOU LEARNED!

1. At least half of all adults over the age of 65 suffer from some type of arthritis pain.
2. Osteoarthritis is one of the most common types of arthritis. It is considered a progressive disease because it gets worse, slowly, over time.
3. Rheumatoid arthritis is an autoimmune disorder. RA is chronic, but it alternates between flare-ups and remissions.
4. Arthritis sufferers may try to avoid exercise, thinking it will increase their pain. However, if they *don't* exercise their joints, the pain will only get worse.
5. Joint protection measures are helpful for anyone with arthritis pain . . . and no doctor's order is needed!

## WHAT IS JOINT PROTECTION?

***“Joint protection” guidelines help people perform ordinary, everyday activities without putting additional strain on their joints.***

### ***Joint protection includes:***

- Asking for help. This is especially important when a task causes pain in one or more joints.
- Taking frequent breaks to stretch and shift position. This helps prevent joints from getting too stiff.
- Using assistive devices. There are *thousands* of different assistive devices available to make everyday tasks easier. These include things like long-handled shoehorns and large-grip silverware.
- Using good posture. This is important whether your client is sitting, standing or lying down.
- Learning new ways to do everyday tasks. If possible, an occupational therapist can help your clients adapt their activities.
- Getting regular exercise. It's important for your clients to follow any special exercise plan provided by a doctor or therapist.



## CAN SURGERY HELP?

***Some people with arthritis can benefit from surgery. An operation on their joint can:***

- Improve the way the joint moves.
- Relieve the pain of arthritis.
- Fix a deformity so that the joint functions more normally.

### ***There are several types of joint surgery:***

- Doctors can fuse two bones together at the joint so that the bones no longer rub together. This gets rid of pain, but the person loses the ability to bend the joint.
- A joint can be partially or totally replaced. This is most commonly done with the knee and hip joints.
- Bone spurs can be surgically removed. This eliminates some types of arthritis pain.
- A joint can be realigned so that it is no longer deformed. This type of surgery allows a joint to function better and decreases pain.

[illegible]



EMPLOYEE NAME  
(Please print):

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

- ***I understand the information presented in this inservice.***
- ***I have completed this inservice and answered at least eight of the test questions correctly.***

EMPLOYEE SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_

SUPERVISOR SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Inservice Credit:

<input type="checkbox"/> Self Study	1 hour
<input type="checkbox"/> Group Study	1 hour

***File completed test  
in employee's  
personnel file.***



## A Disease Process Module: Understanding Arthritis

***Are you "In the Know" about arthritis? Circle the best choice or fill in your answer. Then check your answers with your supervisor!***

- The part of the joint that allows the bones to glide smoothly against each other so that it doesn't hurt to move is called the:**  
A. Synovial fluid. C. Tendon.  
B. Cartilage. D. Ligaments.
- Osteoarthritis is considered a progressive disease because:**  
A. It has flare-ups and remissions. C. It gets worse over time.  
B. It's a modern disease. D. None of the above.
- It's best for people with arthritis to sleep:**  
A. On the floor.  
B. In an upright position in a recliner chair.  
C. On a firm mattress with one small pillow.  
D. With restraints, to keep from moving around too much.
- Fibromyalgia DOES NOT cause pain in:**  
A. Tendons. C. Muscles.  
B. Ligaments. D. Joints.
- True or False**  
A tick bite can lead to arthritis.
- True or False**  
People with arthritis should avoid exercising.
- True or False**  
There is no cure for arthritis.
- True or False**  
People with gout should avoid eating too much meat or drinking too much alcohol.
- True or False**  
Rheumatoid arthritis affects only the hands and feet.
- True or False**  
It's important for all arthritis sufferers to maintain a healthy weight.