

Elizabeth Cohen: Roberta Hagen says she's always uncomfortable. Since her late 30s, she's suffered from osteoarthritis, a deterioration of the joints⁽¹⁾. It causes swelling, stiffness⁽²⁾ and lots of pain.

Roberta: It's a dull⁽³⁾, constant, aching⁽⁴⁾ pain. It never goes away.

Cohen: Osteoarthritis was once thought of as the condition of the elderly but physicians are now seeing it in younger patients. The skyrocketing⁽⁵⁾ rate of obesity is one big reason why.

Dr Lee Ann Rhodes: People who are obese have four times as high a rate of knee pain as those who aren't obese.

Cohen: If you have osteoarthritis in your 30s, chances are your weight, lack of exercise, or genetics play a role. The pain is usually in the knees, back, hips, feet or hands. Doctors say taking a holistic⁽⁶⁾ approach is best at this age.

Dr Rhodes: There is exercise, weight loss where applicable and medication, management to alternative therapies as well, acupuncture, meditation.

Cohen: In your 40s, wear and tear⁽⁷⁾ of the joints takes its toll⁽⁸⁾ as on athletes. In severe cases, surgery is an option. NFL quarterback, Joe Namath developed osteoarthritis in his early 40s. Granted⁽⁹⁾ Namath was abusing his knees every Sunday for 13 years in the NFL, but doctors say even weekend athletes in their 40s can suffer from osteoarthritis if they don't take the time to warm up⁽¹⁰⁾ and then try to do too much.

Dr Rhodes: We're trying to fit in⁽¹¹⁾ high impact, high intensity sports at the weekend when it fits our schedule instead of what's best for our body.

Cohen: More than 20 million Americans have osteoarthritis now and as you approach your 50s, age is the biggest risk factor. Before age 55 more men are likely to develop the disease. After age 55, women are at higher risk according to the arthritis foundation. For people in their 50s, risk factors include joints, excess weight and the couch potato⁽¹²⁾ syndrome. Some doctors recommend lightweight training, swimming or meditation for mild cases, but people like Roberta Hagen who suffer constantly, mainly pain medication. There is no cure for osteoarthritis, doctors say staying active in your early years and keeping off⁽¹³⁾ the pounds can help prevent the condition later in life.

Elizabeth Cohen, CNN Atlanta.

Robin Meade: If you're looking for a good snack, reach for an orange or a tall glass of orange juice. According to the Arthritis foundation, research has shown the importance of vitamin C and other antioxidants in reducing the risks of osteoarthritis and its progression. For more information on osteoarthritis, talk to your doctor, you can also log on to the Arthritis foundation's website at www.arthritis.org.

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Lexical helpline:

1. **joint:** junction between bones
2. **stiffness:** rigidity, inflexibility
3. **dull:** not intensely felt
4. **aching:** constant pain
5. **skyrocketing:** going up dramatically and quickly
6. **holistic:** involving somebody's physical, mental and social conditions
7. **wear and tear:** damage caused by usage
8. **take a toll:** be accompanied by loss or injury
9. **granted:** it is true that
10. **warm up:** prepare for exercise
11. **fit in:** conform to
12. **couch potato:** lazy television viewer
13. **keep off:** avoid