

Conquering Arthritis – It is All About Choices

Arthritis is a common condition and risk increases with age. But pain and inactivity are not inevitable. Two Fauquier Health Wellness Center staffers have offered to share what they have learned about staying healthy and active with arthritis.

LeAnn McCusker, Wellness Center director, and Linda Costello, RN, were diagnosed with arthritis about a decade ago. They have since educated themselves and have learned strategies for lessening the discomfort.



Linda Costello (left), RN, and LeAnn McCusker, Wellness Center director, exercise regularly to help with arthritis pain.

“It came as no surprise to me when I was first diagnosed,” says Linda. “My father had osteoarthritis and I had a family history of it, so I just assumed I would be diagnosed. I knew it would be something I would have to live with.”

Osteoarthritis is the most common form of arthritis. It is caused by cartilage breakdown and changes in the bone. With osteoarthritis, it is important to keep the joints moving and strengthen the muscles that support the joints. In the last two years Linda has increased her mobility and as a result, decreased the pain. She says, “At first you don’t want to move because of the pain, but once you realize the positive effects of exercise, even if it is just a walk, you begin to look forward to incorporating it into your daily routine.”

LeAnn was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis, a more aggressive form of the disease. “It was difficult when I was first diagnosed because I was extremely athletic. I was an active runner and big into strength and conditioning. I had to scale back and modify to where it was comfortable for my condition,” says LeAnn.

They have each learned what works best for them and have enjoyed the group exercise classes offered at the Wellness Center. While they both take part in the yoga and the strength training classes, Linda says her favorite class is Zumba. “With the help of the Wellness Center and the classes, I am in better shape, look better, and feel better than I did before,” says Linda.

While neither relies solely on diet and exercise to battle arthritis, they both agree that these lifestyle choices have really helped with their mobility.

LeAnn says, “It a combination. Between the medicine and becoming more in tune with what my body needs, nutritionally and physically, I am able to manage and continue an active lifestyle, which is important to me, not only in my career but also at home.”

When it comes to arthritis, a personalized approach is best, the women agree. LeAnn offers these words of advice to those recently diagnosed with arthritis. “Start slow. It is OK to modify your workouts; it is OK to take a day off. Listen to your body and find what works best for you.”

Sometimes arthritis becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. People with arthritis often stop moving because it hurts, but the lack of movement makes it worse, so they move even less. Those with arthritis need to find the level of activity that is right for them, but need to always eat a healthy diet and get enough sleep.