



American Baby Boomers and the Arthritis Epidemic

Arthritis is one of the most prevalent chronic health problems and our nation's leading cause of disability. In 2006, arthritis affected an estimated 46 million people, required 39 million visits to a physician and cost the US economy \$86.2 billion. Women are more affected than men and more than half are under the age of 65. The rate of total joint replacements is increasing most rapidly in active people under the age of 59.

Osteoarthritis is a degenerative joint disease in which the cartilage that covers the ends of bones in the joint deteriorates, causing pain and loss of movement as bone begins to rub against bone. It would appear that there are 2 distinctly different paths to developing early arthritic changes.

First, obesity and a sedentary life style contribute to the chronic mechanical overload and poor nutrition to the cartilage. They also contribute to type 2 diabetes and increased insulin resistance, which leads to a complex biochemical cascade resulting in chronic joint inflammation and degeneration.

Second, excessive activity also promotes cartilage destruction. Insufficient strength and poor alignment, combined with excessive participation in activities demanding rapid stopping and lateral movements result in shear forces in the joints and contributes to the degenerative changes. The weekend warriors often suffer from ligament sprains, which initially may be

benign, but eventually the increased joint laxity will also contribute to increasing shear forces in the joints.

Currently, articular degeneration is irreversible. There is a vigorous attempt in the biomedical field to develop drugs and replacement materials to repair cartilage, or at least delay the need for joint replacement surgery.

Prevention, in the form of a healthy lifestyle, is the best medicine. A disciplined lifestyle would include a life long, properly designed exercise program, weight management with a nutritious diet and avoiding smoking and alcohol. Maintaining one's body mass index below 25 minimizes joint loading and a pre-conditioning program for sporting activities insures that the nervous and musculoskeletal systems are prepared

for the demands of the activity.

Many factors contribute to the development of arthritis. Some, like our genetics, we have no control over, while others, like our lifestyle, we can control. **We are our own best doctors.** We must think of our body like we think of our teeth. Daily care prevents the need for extreme measures and neglect will lead to drastic measures, such as replacing body parts!

The therapists at **OPTM** understand the requirements of a well-developed program to assist people with their arthritis care and prevention program. Education is a cornerstone of such a program. We incorporate the current best practices based upon the research evidence into all of our therapeutic programs. Movement is life.

OPTM WELCOMES LAURA PORTERFIELD, DPT

Laura graduated from the University of California, San Diego with a Bachelor of Science degree in Physiology and Neuroscience in 1998. She earned her Doctorate of Physical Therapy from Boston University in 2005. She has been working in outpatient orthopedics since graduation and is pursuing her certification in manual therapy. While at UCSD, she competed as a NCAA athlete as a varsity rower. She has rowed with masters crews in Sacramento and Boston and is hoping to join the Los Gatos Rowing Club.



OPTM WELCOMES LUC NGUYEN, DPT

Luc graduated from San Jose State University and received his Bachelor of Science degree in Kinesiology in 2003. He received his Doctor of Physical Therapy degree from Chapman University in 2006.

