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### **Hawkes Bay Today Vital Signs Column, September 2011 - Arthritis**

There are over 140 different types of Arthritis and half a million New Zealanders currently have the disease. Osteoarthritis is the most common form of Arthritis where the cartilage on each end of a joint bone has been worn away leaving bone rubbing on bone. Rheumatoid Arthritis is an auto-immune disease where the body's immune system starts to attack its own tissues, the joints become inflamed, swollen, deformed and mobility is affected. This week Arthritis New Zealand raises awareness and funds for sufferers. For support, education and services that are available, contact them on 0800 663 463.

There is no cure yet for Arthritis so the primary aim of treatment is to minimise pain and maintain a normal lifestyle. It is ideal to start with lifestyle changes. Exercise helps maintain joint mobility so choose non weight bearing exercise such as swimming or gentle, strengthening exercises like Tai Chi. Age Concern (835 0346), holds Tai Chi classes on Tuesdays 1:30-2:30pm for \$2.00 in Napier.

Foods may be used as natural painkillers and anti-inflammatories. Try onions, garlic, ginger, olives, nuts, oily fish and be liberal with the spice turmeric. Oily fish have high levels of EPA and DHA which may reduce pain and inflammation. If you are taking omega-3 supplements, look for a brand that provides at least 800mg of each. Foods rich in vitamin C may help develop cartilage, vitamin D may decrease the narrowing of joint spacing and calcium may increase bone density. Also, avoid acidic foods such as tomatoes and oranges, which seem to worsen Arthritis symptoms. The best foods are those that help alkalize the blood and include nuts, seeds and lemons - a lovely hot water and lemon drink in the morning is a great start to the day. The most wonderful thing to drink to combat Arthritis is apple cider vinegar with water, honey or apple juice.

Another useful supplement is Glucosamine which is thought to promote joint regeneration and reduce inflammation. It is sourced from shellfish shells so should be avoided in people with seafood allergies. Doses of 1000 to 1500mg per day may help reduce pain. Green lipped mussels (or extract, Lyprinol) have become popular over the last few years. Native to New Zealand, the fluid inside may be helpful for inflammation and other Arthritic symptoms.

Other complementary therapies may help arthritis sufferers. Gentle Chiropractic care can help restore proper mobility and function to affected joints. Chiropractic uses spinal adjustments to correct misalignments, improve joint motion and posture to reduce nerve pressure and inflammation, all helping improve quality of life

A medication regime needs to be individualised to the person. Start with topical rubs and Paracetamol to give a base line of pain relief. Paracetamol works by stopping pain messages being passed to the brain and best results are seen with regular dosing.

Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) work at the site of the injury to interrupt the body's chemical cascade which would normally lead to heat, swelling, pain and redness at the site. Low dose Ibuprofen is normally added to Paracetamol if pain relief is not adequate with Paracetamol alone. The main side effect of these medicines is that they can upset the stomach and have a risk of causing stomach ulcers. The newer COX2 inhibitors may be a good alternative for some people as they don't affect the stomach to the same degree. NSAIDs should be used with caution if asthmatic, history of stomach ulcers, kidney problems or heart disease. Opioid analgesics (Codeine, Pethidine, Tramadol, Morphine) block the perception of pain but can make you drowsy and constipated.

There are several other medicines that are not pain-killers but can modify the course of Rheumatoid Arthritis including Plaquenil and the newer Arava. They work by changing the body's immune response to reduce inflammation. It is important to discuss your condition with your Doctor and let him/her know of any products you may be taking.

**On Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> September, join us at Ahuriri Pharmacy for morning or afternoon tea and advice on Arthritis and therapies that may help you. Ask your questions about supplements. Book your free, private, 45 minute appointment to speak to an Arthritis educator from Arthritis NZ. Assess the benefit of chiropractic therapy for you in a free, 15 minute assessment with First Chiropractic. Phone Peter on 835 7948 today to book your appointments.**