

# 6 Surefire Ways to Shed Weight



PROVEN TIPS FROM THREE WOMEN IN THE BUSINESS OF FOOD.

**A**ccording to a February 2021 Harris Poll, 42% of Americans have gained unwanted weight during the COVID-19 pandemic. The median weight gain was 15 pounds, but 10% gained more than 50 pounds. That's bad news for arthritis.

"Being overweight is one of the risk factors for osteoarthritis [OA], along with joint injury, older age and genetic factors," says Reema Kanda, registered dietitian with Hoag Orthopedic Institute in Irvine, California. "People with more body weight and extra fat may have higher blood levels of substances that cause inflammation throughout the body."

Carolyn O'Neil, a registered dietitian and cookbook author, has severe OA in her right hip. It sidelined her running and walking, and she gained the "pandemic 15" pounds.

"Let's face it, the pandemic lifestyle equals TV binge watching and late-night eating," she says.

In August 2020, she had hip replacement surgery, which spurred her to trim her weight. She's now opting for more nutrient-rich, anti-inflammatory foods and moderate walking to support her weight-management goals.

James Beard award-winning cookbook author Virginia Willis has employed many of the same strategies to lose 65 pounds over two years. Willis bootstrapped her own regimen after a back surgery was cancelled due to the pandemic and her gym and physical therapy facilities both closed.

"I feel better than I have in decades," says the 55-year-old, who no longer needs back surgery or physical therapy and has ditched pain pills.

Try these proven tactics to jumpstart — and sustain — weight loss. ➡➡

## 1 Boost hydration, cut alcohol.

Willis reaches for water before a snack, finding that it often sates her. And she no longer drinks wine while cooking dinner, instead saving it for special occasions, like dinner with friends.

**2 Plan and prep.** Don't grocery shop or cook while hungry, Kanda says, and remove serving dishes from the dining table to discourage second helpings.

**3 Take the long view.** "A good first goal is to lose 5% to 10% of your current weight," Kanda says. "The weight loss will decrease the stress on your knees, hips and lower back and lessen inflammation to help improve symptoms. Success builds confidence."

**4 Lighten up.** "Deprivation doesn't work for me," says Willis. Nothing is off limits, but indulgences are intentional. "Pizza is a plan for me," she says. O'Neil loves potato chips, so she measures out a small bowl to enjoy.

**5 Prioritize exercise.** "My walk is the most important part of my day," Willis says. Other joint-friendly options with arthritis: biking, Pilates, swimming or yoga.

**6 Tame negative self-talk.** Experiment to find what works for you. Notice your behavior and keep a journal to track trends. Do more of what works and be kind to yourself. "Once I stopped self-shaming, my internal critic lessened," says Willis.

Getting back into smaller jeans was gratifying, but vanity isn't why Willis has stayed the course.

"The most striking change is in my ability to move," she says. "Child's [yoga] pose is easier, there's less stress in my back and neck, I don't hurt the next day after a walk. I'm stronger."

—SUZANNE WRIGHT



## WEATHERING PAIN

# How gloomy skies may affect joints.

**R**esearch hasn't established a direct correlation between weather and joint pain, but there is some scientific — and plenty of anecdotal — evidence that when the weather is lousy, arthritis pain spikes and moods tank for many people.

"There are many factors and a lot of individual variation in terms of response to stimuli in our environment," says Terence Starz, MD, retired clinical professor of medicine at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine. "The studies are not definitive, but many patients do experience changes in symptomology with changes in temperature, humidity and barometric pressure."

That's true in the winter months, too. Shorter, colder days and bad weather affects many people, and about 5% of Americans experience seasonal affective disorder, according to the American Psychiatric Association.

"Some people are more sensitive than others," says Dr. Starz, "and when we're in pain, our bodies are more sensitive."

Sluggish mood and poor weather can combine to kill your motivation to exercise, but one of the best ways to combat the blues is to stay active. Movement stimulates the release of chemicals that boost mood.

"Exercise is one of the best ways to manage joint stiffness and pain," says Pamela Mehta, MD, an orthopedic surgeon in San Jose, California. "Without it, you may experience an increase in arthritis symptoms, as well as more severe pain that can exacerbate negative feelings and depression."

"In addition to keeping yourself mobile, getting good sleep is very important," adds Dr. Starz. "Keep yourself warm, work out indoors and seek out cognitive behavioral therapy. Focus on the variables you can control." —S. WRIGHT