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[Lendvov: Health Canada must consider needs of those with arthritis](#)

Around four million Canadians live with osteoarthritis, and many of them use non-prescription medications such as acetaminophen to manage their disease, so many people are affected by potential restrictions around obtaining the drug that have been floated by Health Canada.

The body has proposed limiting daily dosages of acetaminophen and taking 500 milligram tablets off the market over findings that its use is the most common cause of acute liver failure in the country.

The number of people suffering from osteoarthritis is set to increase, due to rising obesity and longevity, going from one in eight Canadians, to one in four within a generation. The rates of osteoarthritis (OA) are increasing fastest among people aged 20-59 years, due largely to childhood obesity and knee injury. While effective therapies exist, as many as 90 per cent of these people have at least one additional chronic condition — most often diabetes, heart disease and high blood pressure, which makes management challenging.

There is no cure.

There are however, research-based coping strategies to prevent the disease from worsening. From diet and exercise to medication, there are practical applications to help people detect and manage the disease early – an important step in delaying its effects and potential impact on other areas of their lives, such as caring for children, participating in the workforce, and enjoying everyday life.

People living with osteoarthritis need to replace old activities with new ones that protect their joints and reduce any excess weight to take the load off their joints. Researchers at Arthritis Research Canada claim exercise is the most effective non-drug ^{OB}treatment for reducing pain and improving movement in osteoarthritis.

The idea of exercising when you are experiencing the pain of arthritis may daunt patients, but they can take comfort in the fact that over time they will feel better and hurt less. Besides the undeniable benefits of exercise, such as weight loss, increased mobility, better sleep and improved heart and lung function, it will likely make them feel more confident and less anxious or depressed.

To help prepare for exercise, many people use non-prescription medications such as acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen (Advil) and acetylsalicylic acid (Aspirin). In fact, millions of Canadians living with osteoarthritis take acetaminophen safely and regularly in order to allow them to exercise and carry on activities of daily living, including work.

Health Canada's proposed acetaminophen risk mitigation plans could be harmful for those people who are doing well on available formulations of acetaminophen. The concern with Health Canada's proposals is that they have little to no data to support their recommendations.

Instead, Health Canada should first develop risk mitigation strategies that first and foremost address health literacy, which is defined by the Public Health Agency of Canada as increasing a person's ability "to access, comprehend, evaluate and communicate information as a way to promote, maintain and improve health in a variety of settings across the life-course."

Canadians need to be better equipped to make good and safe choices when purchasing over-the-counter medications, such as acetaminophen.

Osteoarthritis has its challenges, but one needs to remain positive and hopeful. Patients must adhere to the advice of their professional health care team, which may include a family doctor, rheumatologist, pharmacist, physical therapist, occupational therapist, registered massage therapist and others and educate themselves about arthritis.

At the same time, as we wait for a cure, patients encourage researchers and government to intensify the ongoing development and implementation of feasible and cost-effective approaches to diagnosing and managing OA across Canada.

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