

# Healthy Vibes

— A special monthly health feature from Providence Health & Services

## Keep your moving parts moving

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When Dorothy meets the Tin Man, he's stiff as a statue, his joints rusted tight. It's all he can do to squeak out the word that will get him moving again: "oilcan."



Many of us can sympathize. Over time, our sedentary lives pull a Tin Man on us. We spend years barely moving our bodies, hunched over a desk, slouched in the car, and flopped in front of the TV. When we finally do need to get moving, we no longer can without painful protest from our stiff, rusty knees and hips. Oilcan, please.

Unfortunately, there is no oilcan that can undo the arthritic damage accumulated over a lifetime of immobility. To keep our knees and hips limber and healthy, we need to oil them every day. The only way to do that is to keep our moving parts moving.

That's right: If you want to keep moving, you need to keep moving.

Movement is our oilcan, circulating lubrication around our joints. The more you move, the better your joint fluid circulates, helping your body function like the well-oiled machine it should be. Without movement, the

cartilage that coats the ends of our bones eventually breaks down, leaving bone to wear against bone — the beginning of osteoarthritis.

An active life is the best thing for keeping your knees and hips healthy and pain free. A weekly program of stretching and strength training keeps the muscles and tendons that support your joints flexible and strong. Eating healthy foods provides the nourishment that your body needs to function well. And maintaining a healthy weight protects your joints from excessive stress.

If you're feeling the early stages of arthritis in your joints, you can still engage in gentle, low-impact activities such as swimming, walking and using an elliptical machine. Short-term use of anti-inflammatories can help reduce pain (limit usage to three to four weeks unless your doctor is monitoring your kidneys). Applying ice to painful joints after activity also will reduce pain and swelling. Glucosamine and chondroitin are widely promoted as joint pain remedies, and while large studies have found no scientific evidence that they work, they are certainly safe to try.

If knee or hip pain is eroding your ability to enjoy life, then see your doctor. Primary care providers are very good at evaluating early joint-pain problems. Orthopedists are the next line of defense. Job one is to confirm what's causing your pain,



because several things — such as nerve problems in the back — can be mistaken for hip and knee problems. Once we know what we're dealing with, we can offer appropriate treatment options.

Aside from joint-replacement surgery, there is no proven way to reverse arthritis — it's always progressive. However, we can help slow it down and make life more comfortable. The lifestyle tips mentioned earlier are a great start. Physical therapy and steroid or lubricant injections also can help.

While all of these therapies can

forestall surgery for awhile, arthritis eventually catches up with people. If your quality of life is becoming unacceptable, it may be time to consider joint replacement. And taking care of a new joint is the same as taking care of your original parts: Hit the road — yellow brick or otherwise — and keep on moving. ■

*(Dr. James Ballard is an orthopedic surgeon with Oregon Orthopedic & Sports Medicine Clinic and affiliated with Providence Orthopedic Institute. More information about treatment options for relieving joint pain can be found at [www.jamesballardmd.com](http://www.jamesballardmd.com).)*