



5 Expert Tips to Help Family Caregivers Living with Osteoarthritis



(BPT) - Did you know that one in five American adults are unpaid caregivers? That means approximately 53 million people actively care for family members or friends, most often because that loved one simply needs daily care. If you're one of them, you know that taking care of someone else can be physically and mentally taxing, demanding a lot from you every day. On top of this, you may also live with your own chronic pain and find your symptoms flaring up - an often-overlooked aspect of the job. In fact, 94% of caregivers report experiencing musculoskeletal pain, which could potentially be from osteoarthritis (OA).

According to the CDC, more than 32 million adults in the U.S. have OA, a degenerative disease that causes chronic pain, stiffness and swelling in joints such as the hands, wrists, knees and ankles. For caregivers who also have OA, it might be difficult to provide care to others while they are already experiencing daily pain and discomfort themselves.

How is osteoarthritis treated?

While there is no cure for OA, there are a variety of ways to help manage symptoms, including over-the-counter (OTC) medications and physical therapy. It's important to

consult your healthcare provider, who can offer options depending on your unique situation.

However, there are also a number of steps that caregivers who may be experiencing OA can take to alleviate some of their daily pain and discomfort.

Tips for caring for your joints and relieving pain

1. Keep moving - gently

While the experience of pain may initially make you feel less comfortable with the idea of regular movement, the Arthritis Foundation notes that activities that are gentle on your joints - such as swimming, hiking or biking - can actually help you feel better over time. Even low-impact exercise like a short walk can make a difference for your pain levels. If it's hard to get moving on your own, consider finding a walking buddy or joining an exercise class that can keep you motivated to move.

2. Use a topical, non-steroidal, anti-inflammatory gel to relieve arthritis pain

One effective option for treating arthritis pain is Voltaren Arthritis Pain Gel, the first prescription-strength, over-the-counter nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory gel for arthritis pain. The active ingredient in Voltaren Gel is diclofenac sodium, an effective medicine that is clinically proven to relieve joint pain, reduce stiffness and improve mobility. You apply the gel directly to the site of your pain associated with arthritis to deliver pain relief for your hand, wrist, elbow, foot, ankle or knee - so you can move better and accomplish what you need and want to do each day.

3. Try a heat pack

According to the Arthritis Foundation, many people with osteoarthritis find that regularly applying a heat pack to the area or areas where they experience pain can bring soothing, temporary relief.

4. Make the most of physical therapy

If your healthcare provider recommends physical

therapy, try to incorporate your assigned therapy exercises into your daily routine in short intervals. Per the Arthritis Foundation, regular, brief muscle-strengthening exercises developed by your therapist can help protect your targeted joints.

5. Don't be afraid to ask for help

As a caregiver, it's all too easy to put others ahead of yourself. But it's hard to take it all on your shoulders when you are experiencing pain. Reach out to others in your family or social circle for support and assistance - or even just a rest when you need it - to allow you a little time to take care of yourself.

Everything that you do to care for those who need you every day is important, and so are you. As a caregiver, don't forget to care for your own needs, too. Following these tips can help you feel your best, so you can continue making a difference in the lives of your loved ones.

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Discover the remarkable healing power of therapy cats

(BPT) - You're probably familiar with therapy dogs visiting hospitals, schools, senior centers and nursing homes to help alleviate stress and provide comfort in times of need. But did you know that time spent with therapy cats provides scientifically proven emotional benefits as well? A white paper by Pet Partners found that therapy animals have been shown to decrease levels of general anxiety and alleviate symptoms of depression.

While it may take a sociable and easygoing cat to become a therapy cat, cats in general make ideal therapy animals and are a great alternative to therapy dogs. Plus, their smaller size and affinity for sitting on laps and cuddling can make them a good option for quieter environments and people who have limited mobility.

At Pet Partners, the largest therapy pet organization in the U.S., the Therapy Animal Program has had more than 1,500 cats registered over the years and currently has more than 140 registered cat teams.

[Shining a light on the benefits of therapy cats for seniors](#)

While everyone has experienced the emotional toll of recent world events, seniors have been especially impacted due to extended periods of isolation and increased loneliness. A study published in the National Library of Medicine found that decreased social life and fewer in-person social interactions during the pandemic were associated with reduced quality of life and increased depression.

Therapy animal visits play a crucial role in helping during times of hardship. The Pet Partners white paper showed that therapy animals, including therapy cats, can especially comfort those with dementia, promoting socialization and engagement, and decreasing depression, anxiety and irritability in seniors. Time spent with cats can be a stimulating and highly engaging form of therapy - boosting mental health and enhancing one's sense of well-being. And while nothing replaces the emotional connection of petting a cat, research by Pet Partners also reveals that even engaging with virtual pet content can still be impactful.

To provide more seniors with access to the benefits of therapy cats, Purina Cat Chow partnered with Pet Partners and the Institute on Aging, a non-profit dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for aging adults, to offer free virtual therapy cat visits for seniors over age 60. In addition, Cat Chow is providing up to \$25,000 in financial support to Pet Partners to support the cats in their Therapy Animal Program so more people can experience their therapeutic benefits.

The mental health benefits of therapy cat visits

Pet Partners therapy cat handler Tracy Howell has seen firsthand the impact therapy cat visits can have.

"During my time as a therapy cat handler volunteer, we have had the opportunity to visit locations from nursing facilities and assisted living centers, to Children's Hospitals and universities," said Howell about her cats Roger and Sal. "Cats have the unique ability to draw people out like no other interactions can. During a visit

to a senior living facility, we were with a group of seniors who were taking turns petting Roger when a woman came up and joined the group and said she liked cats. A nurse later told me that the woman had never joined the group before or spoken much to anyone there!"

Howell loves to see how her cats affect others. "It is such a joy to be able to share your animal with other people and watch their faces light up," she said. "I think therapy cat visits make them feel special. For those having a hard day, once you see the ways you can relieve or distract them from their hardship, even for a few moments, it's one of the most rewarding experiences."

And it's not just the people who benefit - the cats enjoy their experience as well. "Roger purrs nonstop the whole time he is there," said Howell. "I really think he's into the healing properties of purrs!"

To learn more about the healing power of cats, how you can get involved, and how Cat Chow is helping, visit CatChow.com/therapy.



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