FAST FACTS: Joint Pain

Joint pain is associated with either a trauma to or disease of the joints and is extremely common in older adults. If there has not been a traumatic injury, such as a fall, the focus of joint pain is on an inflammatory joint disease such as chronic osteoarthritis (OA), degenerative joint disease (DJD), or gouty arthritis. Both OA and DJD have a slow onset and become a chronic condition. Both may respond to pain medications or physical therapy. Gout requires prescription medication during the acute attack.

✓ Osteoarthritis (OA) / Degenerative Joint Disease (DJD)
  - Common sites are knees, fingers, ankles, spine, hips, feet, shoulder.
  - Affects multiple sites and is caused by wear and tear on the joint.
  - Signs/symptoms: joint stiffness is most common in morning, pain typical after exercise or pressure on joint, rest may not relieve pain in the affected joint.

✓ Gouty Arthritis
  - Most common site is the big toe, followed by ankles, heel, knee, wrist, and fingers.
  - Seen in men over age 35 and woman after menopause.
  - Caused by increased levels of uric acid.
  - Signs/symptoms: red, hot, swollen, and/or inflamed joint but NO morning stiffness.

✓ Traumatic Injury
  - Dislocation or ligament/tendon injury; sudden onset of pain/swelling after a trauma.
  - Immobilize the injury site and call your healthcare provider, ice may help.

✓ Possible Intervention(s)
  - Osteoarthritis / Degenerative Joint Disease
    o Try early morning range of motion or low impact exercise.
    o If pain is in response to exercise, rest the joint; ice or heat may also help.
    o Medication is often needed to relieve the pain.
  - Gouty Arthritis
    o Medication typically needed at the onset of an attack.
    o Prevention is KEY: avoid alcohol and foods high in purines which are the chemical compounds that cause uric acid (get list from healthcare provider).

✓ What Else You Should Do
  - Write down and share information about your pain with your healthcare provider.
  - Use a Pain Diary to note important information useful to the healthcare provider.
  - Try a non-drug treatment and document the impact on your pain in your Pain Diary.

References