

KEEPING WELL

A JOURNAL OF WELLNESS AND GOOD HEALTH CARE

WINTER 2011

Pain by the joint

Treating common problems in the places where bones meet

IT'S pretty easy to take most of the 200-plus joints in the body for granted—until something goes awry.

Then, certainly, an ailing joint gets your attention, as anyone can attest who's ever suffered from an arthritic hip, throbbing knee or any other kind of painful problem in a place where two or more bones meet.

If, by chance, you're coping with an aching joint right now, there are likely some remedies available to ease your pain. Of course, your doctor is the go-to person for specific advice on your case.

In the meantime, here's a look at some of the most effective treatments for common problems in some of the major joints, with information from the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons and the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

Be hip to a new hip

Arthritis is the major cause of hip pain and disability. It wears away the protective cartilage that cushions the ends of bones and helps the hip joint glide. If cartilage disappears completely, bones rub directly against each other, making movement very painful.

The damage arthritis causes can't be reversed. Still, there are things that can help control the pain of mild arthritis and slow the disease's progression:

- ▶ Physical therapy or activity that includes gentle, regular exercise, such as swimming or cycling.

Lower costs, shorter stays and personal attention for patients—just three benefits of Val Verde Regional Medical Center's new hospitalist program. See page 2.

* VVRMC events

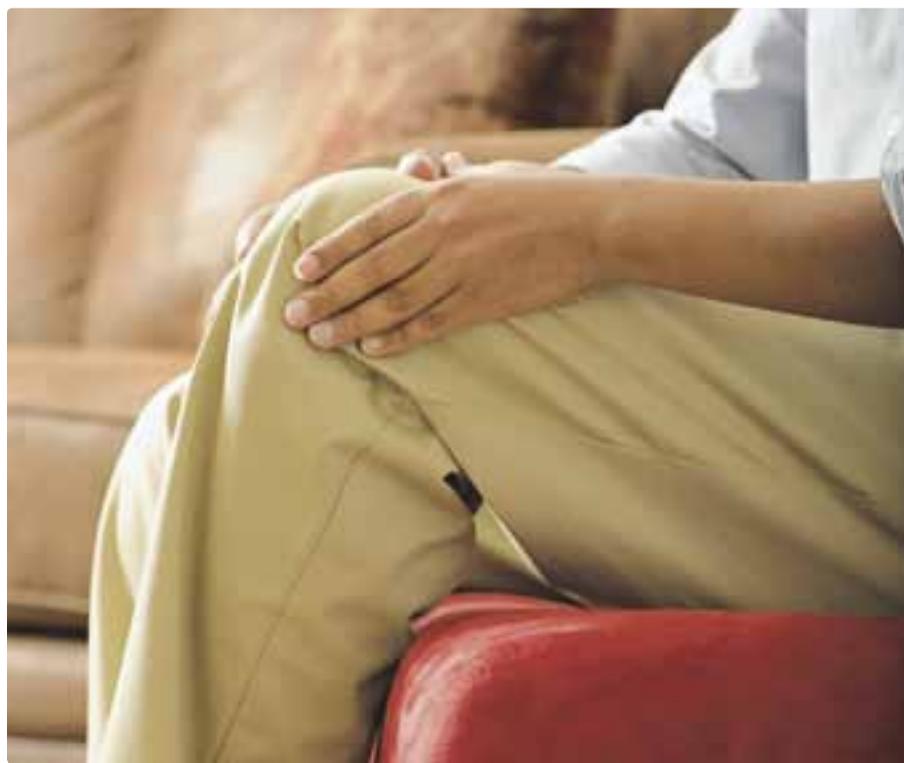
Val Verde Regional Medical Center (VVRMC) is dedicated to the health and well-being of our community. In order to help you stay well, VVRMC is proud to offer a variety of health-related seminars through the Community Health Education Series. Upcoming programs include:

Fibromyalgia and Rheumatoid Arthritis

- ▶ Tuesday, January 25, 6 p.m.
Presented by Methodist Healthcare—San Antonio
- ▶ Wednesday, February 23, noon
Presented by VVRMC's Rehabilitation Services Department

Good Oral Habits for Children

- ▶ Monday, March 21, 6 p.m.
Presented by Amigo Children's Dental
- All classes are held at VVRMC in the Memorial Conference Room. All classes are free, and food will be provided. For more information, call Education/staff development.



Numbers to know



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830-775-8566
info@vvrmc.org
www.vvrmc.org
Customer care:
830-703-1717
Education/ staff development:
830-778-3635
Geriatric mental health (Heritage Program):
830-778-3629
Hospice:
830-774-4580
Human resources/ job line:
830-703-1716
Imaging center:
830-703-1743
Pastoral care:
830-775-8566, ext. 2253
Patient accounts:
830-778-3690
Public relations:
830-778-3651
Rehabilitation services:
830-703-1729
Respiratory care:
830-703-1742
Safe Kids:
830-778-3632

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Pain by the joint

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easily injured. Get medical treatment for an injury right away if you:

- ▶ Hear a popping noise and feel your knee give out.
- ▶ Have severe pain.
- ▶ Can't move your knee or start to limp.
- ▶ Have swelling at the injury site.

One of the most common knee injuries is a tear in the anterior cruciate ligament (ACL), tissue that acts like strong rope to keep the knee stable. Changing direction rapidly, slowing down when running and landing incorrectly from a jump all can cause an ACL injury. When an ACL is torn, it often needs to be repaired with surgery.

The good news: ACL repairs are generally done arthroscopically, requiring only small incisions that speed recovery. This minimally invasive surgery can also be used to fix a torn meniscus, an easily injured piece of cartilage that acts like a shock absorber in the knee.

Shoulder less of a burden

If you twist your shoulder very hard, you might dislocate it—meaning that the ball at the top of the bone in your upper arm has popped out of its socket. Expect severe pain and an abnormally shaped shoulder. See a doctor right away. Typically, he or she will be able to push the ball of the upper arm back into its proper place.

Another common shoulder injury is a rotator cuff tear. Your rotator cuff stabilizes your shoulder joint. It's made up of several tendons (bands of tissue that connect muscles to bones) and four muscles that cover the top of the upper arm bone. You can tear this part of your body in a fall or other mishap. But most tears occur because of repetitive overhead motions, such as throwing a baseball again and again.

Resting your shoulder, using pain medication and participating in physical therapy may be all that's necessary to help you heal. In some cases, surgery may be needed.

Wave goodbye to elbow pain

Even if you've never picked up a tennis racket, you've probably heard of tennis elbow, an inflammation of the tendons that join the forearm muscles on the outside of the elbow. What you might not know is that tennis elbow can strike anybody who overuses these muscles, from factory workers to house painters.

The first step toward recovery is resting your arm. Pain relievers, muscle-strengthening exercises and the use of a forearm brace can also ease the pain of tennis elbow. If these nonsurgical treatments aren't effective, your doctor may advise surgery.

More information

Val Verde Regional Medical Center offers physical and occupational therapies to help you recover from joint problems. Call 830-703-1729 for a consultation.



HOSPITALISTS

They're here when you need them

MORE and more hospitals in the United States are employing hospitalists—doctors who specialize in treating hospitalized patients.

Val Verde Regional Medical Center implemented its hospitalist program in September.

Because hospitalists work exclusively in the hospital, they are readily available to see patients, answer questions and respond quickly to situations that arise.

Hospitalists don't replace your primary care physician, but they do manage your overall care while you're in the hospital.

According to the Society of Hospital Medicine, studies have shown that hospitalists may help increase patient satisfaction among those they treat while decreasing the length of hospital stays and lowering hospital costs.

For more information about hospitalists, you can visit the Society of Hospital Medicine website at www.hospitalmedicine.org.

New year, healthier future

Three strategies for getting real with your resolutions

DOES your checklist of New Year's resolutions need a reality check?

If you're like many people, you may be aiming too high with your annual aspirations. That means you might give up before you really get started.

Making significant lifestyle changes takes time and patience. With realistic resolutions, you put yourself in a position to succeed.

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To get started on changes you can stick with for decades rather than days, the American Psychological Association suggests that you:

1 Take small steps. Don't try to reinvent your whole life in one fell swoop. Break down big goals into small stages. Maybe you want to get your house organized. Start with one room and one task in that room. Once you've accomplished the first project, it will motivate you to move on to the next.

2 Set a realistic timetable. You've probably picked up your current habits over time, so don't necessarily

expect to get rid of them overnight. If you want to wean yourself off nicotine or lose 20 pounds, recognize that it will take some time. Set up a calendar with weekly targets. You'll feel less overwhelmed as you try to accomplish these major goals.

3 Seek support.

Everyone knows it's difficult to make lifestyle changes. Reach out to family and friends. Join a support group. Look for an exercise buddy. You'll likely find that sharing your journey makes the trip easier.

Finally, there may be times that your resolve begins to dissolve. Just remember—60 percent of those who make good on their New Year's resolutions fall short one or more times before succeeding, so stick with it.



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KEEPING WELL is published as a community service for the friends and patrons of VAL VERDE REGIONAL MEDICAL CENTER, 801 Bedell Ave., Del Rio, TX 78840, telephone 830-775-8566, website www.vvrmc.org.

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