

Cell phone addiction can lead to joint injuries

Popular supplement glucosamine has weak scientific evidence to prove efficiency

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Keeping a good posture goes a long way in maintaining good health, including keeping your joints healthy, said Dr. Benjamin Tow, an orthopedic and spine surgeon at Mt. Elizabeth Hospital in Singapore.



“Shoulder, back, neck and knees are very common problems because we are active people, we move our joints all the time. The joints can give us a lot of problems as we age, or as we become more active,” Tow said.

To ensure healthy joints as one ages, Tow advises training the body to maintain a good posture at all times, avoid chronic overloading—meaning, excess weight—that can lead to faster degeneration of the joints, and to always warm up before exercising. When in pain, stop exercising to allow the body to recover first instead of aggravating the injury.

“Taking care of the joints should be a lifestyle process. Smoking is bad for the joints. Joints can last a lifetime if we don’t damage them with injuries,” he said.

Good posture

“A lot of joint problems can be prevented by good posture, by not overloading, and by doing moderate exercises.”

Tow said production workers who need to keep on looking down, or people who keep looking down on their devices like laptops and phones, are prone to joint injuries since these activities encourage bad posture.

Women who constantly carry heavy leather bags should be wary of chronic overloading of their joints. It helps to ditch the high heels, too.

The effects of poor posture on the neck may not be felt when people are younger, Tow said, but is a certainty when they hit their late 40s, 50s and 60s.

The joints connect the bones, bear the weight and provide stability and mobility. They are partly made up of ligaments and cartilage. The cartilage functions like a lubricant cushioning the joints so the bones do not rub together. Understanding how they function and how one's lifestyle and overall health can affect them is crucial in case one develops arthritis, gout or osteoarthritis.

Prevention

But instead of popping supplements to supposedly keep the joints healthy, Tow said people should focus on avoiding overloading the joints and avoid damaging it, as prevention. Most people do not develop symptoms until a significant joint damage has occurred, although symptoms may manifest as early as 18. Symptoms of joint damage include redness and swelling, and tenderness and warmth. It may also include limping, locking of the joint, loss of range of motion of the joint area, stiffness and weakness.

Tai chi, yoga

Stretching and practicing tai chi can help, Tow said. Yoga helps to make the muscles stronger, he said, and while strengthening the muscles is helpful, the fact that yoga can improve the posture is in itself a big plus.

Glucosamine, the popular supplement said to increase lubrication and decrease inflammation and therefore help manage pain, has weak scientific evidence to prove efficiency, he said.

“Taking glucosamine is like taking ginseng—there's not strong evidence behind them but there's no harm in taking them,” Tow said.