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Arthritis Today

ENTERTAIN
WITHOUT
THE PAIN

5 GUYS
With Arthritis
OPEN UP

WHICH DRUG
IS BEST
FOR YOU?

Why
Kindness
COUNTS

TV host and
comedian
**MATT
ISEMAN**
tells how he
got the last
laugh on RA

playing the man card

HAVING ARTHRITIS IS TOUGH. BUT MEN ARE SUPPOSED TO BE, TOO, RIGHT? HERE'S WHAT A FEW MEN WITH ARTHRITIS HAVE TO SAY ABOUT IT. BY TIMOTHY GOWER

Being a guy in today's world means facing constant challenges, like finding the right golf app for your smartphone or combing over a bald spot without looking like Donald Trump. However, being a guy with arthritis comes with some very real difficulties. Having sore, stiff joints can get in the way of fulfilling many roles we often associate with men, whether it's providing for the family, cutting the grass or hanging out with the guys. Dealing with arthritis can often leave a guy feeling like he's been stripped of his man card.

Men react to symptoms differently than women do, partly as a result of physiological differences. "Hormones play a big role in pain perception," says Julia Kim, PhD, clinical psychologist at the Hospital for Special Surgery in New York City, explaining that estrogen lowers pain tolerance. Yet social expectations about masculinity can work against men coping with arthritis symptoms.

"Men learn to live by certain rules, which include not expressing our feelings, holding back important information and not wanting to appear vulnerable," says Robert Garfield, MD, a psychotherapist and professor of psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania and author of *Breaking the Male Code: Unlocking the Power of Friendship* (Gotham, 2015).

Rheumatologist Neil Kramer, MD, sees the price of male stoicism in his practice at Overlook Medical Center in Summit, N.J. "Men tend to ignore their symptoms and will tolerate a lot more swelling and overt signs of arthritis, much more than the women I treat," he says. "Those same men run the risk of having progressive joint damage and becoming more disabled."

Yet doctors also sound notes of optimism about their male arthritis patients. "They tend to be very positive in their outlook and carry on with their lives," says Dr. Kramer.

It's important to maintain perspective, adds Kim. "You might have to change how you do certain things, but you are the man you used to be."

Here are the stories of five men who say arthritis challenged their very sense of "guy-ness," but who made some adjustments and are winning the game.





Matt Iseman, 44
RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS
Los Angeles

One of the Guys

Matt Iseman is a funny man, but the standup comic and cohost of *American Ninja Warrior* isn't laughing as he recalls a pickup basketball game with some buddies during his college reunion in 2002 at Princeton University. At 6 foot, 3 inches, Iseman has always been athletic; he was a star pitcher on Princeton's baseball team. Since heading to Hollywood to pursue

a career in comedy and acting (after graduating with honors from medical school), he had been working out five or six days a week.

However, in the months preceding the reunion, he had developed a variety of aches, which he assumed came from working out too hard. Then his energy level sank, he gained 50 pounds and found himself sleeping 12 hours a day. That day on the basketball court, “I remember wanting to lose so the game would end, I was so exhausted,” says Iseman. Trouble continued back home. “My feet hurt, I was stiff, out of shape and chubby. I didn’t feel like myself, so it was hard to be around the guys,” recalls Iseman. “I really felt like I was missing out.”

Several doctors failed to figure out what was causing his health woes, including one who advised him to wear clogs for better arch support. “Wearing clogs is a great way to stay single in Hollywood,” quips Iseman. “I clip-clopped around like a Clydesdale.”

Finally, a rheumatologist diagnosed rheumatoid arthritis (RA), and Iseman’s life turned around once he began taking medication. “It was like a heavy veil lifted,” he says. “My energy came back.”

Today, Iseman stays in shape with yoga, Pilates and swimming. Throughout it all, doing standup and hanging out with his comedian buddies – “laughing, telling jokes, writing jokes” – helped him stay sane, says Iseman, now 44. “No matter how bad you feel, laughing just makes you feel better.”



**Jeff
Krakoff, 51**
**RHEUMATOID
ARTHRITIS**
Pittsburgh



The Man About the House

For Jeff Krakoff, the reality of being a man with RA sank in one day years ago, all because he wanted a pickle. Try as he might, his swollen, aching fingers lacked the strength to pop the jar lid. Finally, he turned to his wife, Lori, with a question he never dreamed he’d have to ask: “Honey, could you open this for me?”

Greater blows to Krakoff’s male pride could be found in his driveway and yard. The year his son, Andy, was born, the Krakoffs’ hometown, Pittsburgh, was hit with a blizzard. Jeff looked on, feeling defeated, as Lori cleared the driveway, because he could barely make it out of bed. When Andy was old enough, he took on the chore. “It doesn’t feel great when your 9-year-old son is shoveling snow for you because you can’t,” says Jeff, 51, who runs a public relations firm. “But there were days when I just couldn’t.”

Jeff, an athlete since his youth, initially found it difficult to accept the limitations brought on by RA, which he’s had since his 20s. “I struggled for a long time.