STATE OF MARYLAND

DHMH PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Arthritis Affects One Third of Maryland Adults

BALTIMORE, MD (November 21, 2003) -- When people hear about arthritis, they think of it as a single disease. But it is actually a group of diseases that affects joints, their surrounding tissues and other connective tissues.

And, a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) survey shows that about one third of adults in Maryland suffer from some form of arthritis. Nationally, arthritis is the leading cause of disability among adults, resulting in about $22 billion dollars of direct medical costs and $60 billion dollars in lost wages annually.

The survey also found that arthritis, whose most common forms include osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis and fibromyalgia, is more common among adults who are overweight and who are less physically active. In general, adults with arthritis report poorer health than those without the disease.

"People with arthritis often limit or avoid physical activity because it causes discomfort," said Nelson J. Sabatini, Secretary of the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH). "However, research shows that over time, moderate physical activity actually improves arthritis symptoms and prevents further joint deterioration."

An effort to place greater emphasis on the benefits of physical activity for those who have arthritis is the focus of a campaign being implemented by DHMH and the Maryland Chapter of the Arthritis Foundation. This partnership is using funds from the CDC to increase public awareness and develop programs to reduce the burden of arthritis in Maryland.

State agencies, academic institutions and private organizations are also involved in the campaign, called "Physical Activity: The Arthritis Pain Reliever." It features print and radio advertising, as well as the distribution of educational materials and informative community workshops.

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For people with arthritis, low-impact activities like walking, swimming, and bicycling are best. Everyday activities like gardening, house cleaning and washing the car are also effective.

"These are particularly good because they will strengthen the heart and help with weight control if done regularly," said Sabatini.

How much physical activity is necessary? Studies show that 30 minutes of activity per day, three or more days of the week, is enough to improve symptoms for most people. The activity can be divided throughout the day and still be effective. For example, 20 minutes of swimming in the morning and a 10-minute walk after dinner is sufficient daily activity.

Most Marylanders with arthritis are not aware that self-help programs exist to show people how to manage their symptoms.

"Information on arthritis courses is available through the Maryland Chapter of the Arthritis Foundation by calling 800-365-3811," said Jan Thompson, President of the Maryland Chapter. "The courses are offered at many hospitals, community centers and health clubs."

For more information about the Maryland Arthritis project, contact Jade Leung at 410-767-2919. Or, visit the Web site at <*www.fha.state.md.us/ohpetup/arthritis*>.

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