Osteoarthritis and joint pain

Q My mother has been diagnosed with osteoarthritis. She is only 45, which seems young for this condition. At what age do people usually get it and how is it caused?

A Frederic J. Vagnini, MD: Osteoarthritis is a pathological change of joints that often occurs in cartilage, the sticky slippery tissue that covers the tip of the bone at the joint. Healthy cartilage allows the bone to move smoothly and absorbs concussions produced by the body’s movement. In osteoarthritis, not only is the cartilage surface injured, it can also gradually wear out, causing the bones to grind against each other and resulting in pain and swelling. The joints may even lose their ability to move, and damaged joints may gradually deform. As the disease progresses, and in more serious cases, osteophytes grow on the edge of the joints. In these joints, bone or cartilage will gradually peel off and hang in the space between the joints, causing more pain and loss of mobility.

Osteoarthritis often starts in people around 45 years old or older, so your mother is not really too young to suffer from this disease. More than 50 percent of people over the age of 65 will suffer from osteoarthritis in at least one joint, and for people in their seventies and eighties the rate can reach as high as 70 percent. Currently there are over 20 million people in North America suffering from osteoarthritis. Although the main cause is the long-term use of the joints, continuously rubbing together under pressure from carrying heavy loads, osteoarthritis can also occur in patients much younger, most often due to joint injury.

Carbohydrates and your children

Q What are good and bad carbs for growing kids?

A Joey Shulman, DC, RNCP: Due to energy demands and rapid growth spurts, a child’s body relies on...