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RHEUMATISM

Practice Newsletter

SUMMER 2023

ARA Welcomes New Physician Assistant



LAURA ROBBINS, PA-C, is a board-certified Physician Assistant (PA) originally from Minnesota where she completed her B.A. in Speech Pathology at the University of Minnesota. Laura graduated from PA school at Trevecca Nazarene University in Nashville, TN. After graduation, she and her husband sought out a warmer climate and moved to Tucson, AZ. While in Tucson, Laura worked for an internal medicine/family medicine practice and enjoyed developing long-term patient-provider relationships. She also enjoyed volunteering for the Community Food Bank of Tucson.

In October 2021, she and her husband moved to Alexandria, VA, and she took on a nontraditional

role as a PA at George Washington Medical Faculty Associates. In this role, she was able to work on clinical trials evaluating the use and safety of different medications for the treatment of COVID-19. During this time, she also worked on a mobile unit through an HIV Prevention Trials Network study. She and a small team of providers managed various health conditions in the underserved populations in Washington, DC.

Laura and her husband live in Old Town, Alexandria. She enjoys walking her dog along the Mt. Vernon Trail in her free time, seeking out new restaurants and coffee shops, reading, and spending the day at a museum with her husband.

Laura works with Dr. David Wolfe seeing patients at our Chevy Chase location.

*To schedule an appointment with Laura Robbins,
visit www.arapc.com.*

Introducing ARA's Medical Cannabis Institute



Under the direction of David Wolfe, MD, the Medical Cannabis Institute at ARA offers expert evaluation, consultation, and management for patients who wish to safely incorporate medical cannabis into their treatment plans for common rheumatology-related symptoms such as pain, spasm, and insomnia.

Dr. Wolfe has been offering medical cannabis certifications along with expert guidance and supervision for ARA patients in DC and Maryland for over 10 years. Given his success with patients, ARA has established the Medical Cannabis Institute to reach and help more eligible patients. This service, which includes Dr. Wolfe, Alisha Zaveri, PA-C, Blake Leibowitz, PA-C, and Laura Robbins, PA-C, can now help any person over age 21 who resides in DC, Maryland, and Virginia who wishes to be certified to use medical cannabis. This includes patients within ARA and those who are referred by outside medical practitioners. Dr. Wolfe and his team work closely with the referring provider to identify good candidates for the use of medical cannabis and then develop an individualized treatment plan.

We spoke with Dr. Wolfe and asked him some questions about medical cannabis and ARA's Medical Cannabis Institute.

Is medical cannabis legal for everyone? The District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia have all adopted laws that make it legal for any resident of those jurisdictions to be registered in their medical cannabis programs. However, some exclusions include registered firearm owners in Maryland who are prohibited from being certified to use medical cannabis. Medical cannabis remains illegal at the federal level, so Federal Government employees may jeopardize their employment if they use medical cannabis. Medical cannabis can only be purchased at a licensed medical cannabis dispensary. For those unable to go to a dispensary, a friend or family member can

be designated as a "caregiver" who is authorized to make purchases at a dispensary on their behalf.

Why should a person certify in a state medical cannabis program if recreational cannabis is legal and available? Similarly, why would I need to make an appointment at the Medical Cannabis Institute?

DC currently has an unregulated "gifting" program for recreational cannabis, which is not recommended, and a framework for recreational cannabis sales has stalled in the Virginia legislature and it is not currently available. While adult use (recreational) cannabis is legal in Maryland as of July 1st, 2023, those who are registered as medical cannabis patients will have access to a wider range of medicinal products, will have easier access to the purchase of cannabis, and, while adult use (recreational cannabis) will be taxed at 9%, medical cannabis is not taxed. The Medical Cannabis Institute provides expert advice and supervision to those who are interested in using cannabis safely and effectively and this is not available without an appointment.

What medical conditions are treated at the Medical Cannabis Institute? The Rheumatologists and Physician Assistants at the Medical Cannabis Institute focus on treating the symptoms we are most familiar with and have the best support in the medical literature. These include **chronic pain, muscle spasms, and insomnia.**

What medical conditions are not treated at the Medical Cannabis Institute? The Rheumatologists and Physician Assistants at the Medical Cannabis Institute do **not** treat those conditions with which they are not familiar including PTSD, depression, glaucoma, nausea, anorexia, seizures, wasting syndrome, autism, Alzheimer's, multiple sclerosis, or other acute or chronic diseases.

What is in medical cannabis? Medical cannabis consists of different ratios of chemicals from the

cannabis (marijuana) plant including THC, CBD, CBN, CBG, THCA, CBDA, and terpenes. Only THC is potentially intoxicating, and this effect can be minimized or avoided by carefully adjusting the ratio of chemicals consumed.

How is medical cannabis used? Most patients use medical cannabis in the form of edibles, oral tinctures, or topicals. Regular smoking or vaping of cannabis is generally discouraged as dose control is more difficult and chronic smoking or vaping can be harmful to the lungs.

How does medical cannabis work? Medical cannabis works by interacting with a complex series of receptors and chemicals in the human body called the endocannabinoid system. Deficiencies and imbalances in this system seem to play a central role in the processing and perception of pain and in difficulties initiating and maintaining sleep, among other things.

Is medical cannabis safe? Cannabis use is generally safe and well tolerated if an individual starts with a low dose and increases the dose slowly. There has never been a reported death directly attributable to cannabis including after consumption of very large amounts. There are medical or psychiatric conditions and certain medications that make use of medical cannabis potentially problematic for some people. Members of the Medical Cannabis Institute, working with other treating providers, if necessary, ensure that a patient is a good candidate to use medical cannabis.

How does a person get certified to use medical cannabis? Eligible residents of Maryland and Virginia can be certified by a member of the Medical Cannabis Institute who also offer expert advice and supervision pre- and post-certification. Residents of the District of Columbia can “self-certify” for the DC Medical Cannabis program and no longer require certification by a medical provider. Nonetheless, the same expert advice and supervision is available to DC residents through the Medical Cannabis Institute.

Is medical cannabis covered by insurance? Unfortunately, medical cannabis itself is not covered by insurance although your consultation at the ARA Medical Cannabis Institute is covered by participating insurance plans.

Since medical cannabis is legal in Maryland, why do I need to be seen at the Medical Cannabis Institute or certify in the medical cannabis program? Even though adult use (recreational) cannabis is legal in Maryland as of July 1st, 2023, those who are registered as medical cannabis patients will have access to a wider range of medicinal products and, while adult use cannabis is taxed at 9%, medical cannabis is not taxed. Furthermore, the Medical Cannabis Institute provides expert advice and supervision to those who are interested in using cannabis safely and effectively.

How can I learn more? If you suffer from uncontrolled chronic pain, muscle spasms, or insomnia, ask your ARA provider for a referral to a member of the Medical Cannabis Institute or, if you are not currently a patient of ARA, you can book an appointment for a new patient consultation at the ARA Medical Cannabis Institute.

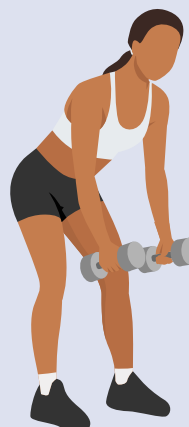
Natural Remedies to Reduce Joint Pain

EVA ROTTMANN, DO

Q. What natural things can I do to help my joint pain?



A. Healthy lifestyle habits are associated with better joint pain outcomes. This means getting enough uninterrupted sleep at night, physical exercise, and a healthy diet. Having good mental health can be just as important as our physical health as we know that joint pain can also be exacerbated in times of stress. These lifestyle factors should complement a treatment plan discussed with your rheumatologist.



Q. Should I avoid exercising if I have arthritis?

A. Most patients do not have to avoid exercising. Keeping up with strength training, aerobics, and range of motion exercises has long-term benefits for both inflammatory and degenerative types of arthritis. However, your exercise regimen should be tailored to your specific

condition to improve function and avoid injury. Patients usually enjoy working with a physical therapist to determine what's right for them.

Q. Can I follow an anti-inflammatory diet to reduce inflammation?

A. Chronic inflammation can be associated with conditions such as diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular diseases, cancer, and musculoskeletal disorders. There is not enough data to confirm anti-inflammatory diet can combat these diseases, however, more research is developing in this complex field. Current research suggests a balanced diet of whole grains, high fiber, polyphenol-rich vegetables, and omega-3 fatty acid-rich foods might be able to improve disease-related fatigue.



continued on next spread...

The Importance of Yoga to Improve Quality of Life

BRANDI BIAGAS, CYT

Are you looking to improve your overall quality of life? Look no further than the ancient and sacred practice of yoga! Yoga originated in Northern India over 3000 years ago and it is a powerful tool for physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional well-being. Yoga is a practice that connects the body, breath, and mind. It uses physical postures, breathing exercises, and meditation to improve overall health. Yoga was developed as a spiritual practice thousands of years ago and today most Westerners who practice yoga do it for exercise or to reduce stress.

First and foremost, yoga helps improve our physical health. The practice of yoga involves moving the body through various postures, which can help build strength, flexibility, and balance. Yoga poses stretch and lengthen muscles, tendons, and ligaments, which leads to increased flexibility and range of motion. Balancing poses help to improve proprioception, or the ability to sense your body's position in space. By improving flexibility, strength, and balance, yoga can help reduce the risk of injury during physical activities. Additionally, yoga has been shown to help reduce chronic pain and inflammation, improve cardiovascular health, improve digestion, improve sleep, and boost the immune system.

Yoga has numerous mental health benefits including stress and anxiety reduction, improved mood, increased mindfulness,

improved emotional regulation, and increased overall well-being. Cortisol is the primary stress hormone in the body and yoga has been proven to reduce this stress hormone by activating the parasympathetic nervous system which promotes relaxation. Researchers found significantly decreased levels of cortisol in a study of participants practicing yoga for just 12 weeks. Yoga has also been shown to improve mood and reduce symptoms of depression by increasing levels of serotonin, a neurotransmitter that regulates mood. Yoga encourages mindfulness, which is the practice of being present and fully engaged in the present moment. Mindfulness helps with anxiety by helping you learn to stay with difficult feelings without analyzing, suppressing, or encouraging them. Yoga teaches you to feel and acknowledge your worries, irritations, and other difficult thoughts and emotions which helps them to dissipate for better emotional regulation.

Most importantly, yoga helps us to connect to ourselves and remember our true nature. With life's daily stresses, we often find ourselves with inner turmoil and restlessness that can lead to anxiety and endless chatter in the mind. Yoga brings forth a wonderful opportunity to calm this inner dialogue and reconnect with our true selves and remember that there is a force of stillness within each of us that endures through



everything. By connecting with the breath and the body, yoga can help us tune into our own internal rhythms and find a greater sense of balance and harmony.

In short, the practice of yoga is a powerful tool for improving physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Whether you're looking to build strength and flexibility, reduce stress and anxiety, or simply cultivate a greater sense of inner peace, yoga has something to offer everyone.

So why wait? Start your yoga practice today and start experiencing the many benefits for yourself. Check ARA's Wellness Events for upcoming yoga classes. Namaste.

Gain Control of the Pain

SONIA SILINSKY KRUPNIKOVA, MD

Anyone who has ever been told "no pain, no gain" has likely wanted to turn that statement around to the person telling them to push through. But as much as one may try to avoid it, pain is the body's way of letting us know that something is wrong. What that "something" is can vary widely. Common causes of pain include ongoing inflammation, damage from prior injury or inflammation, and increased sensitivity to pain.

Inflammation is a manifestation of the body's response to injury or infection. It can be local (like when you cut yourself) or systemic (like from autoimmune diseases or infections). Inflammation is caused by immune cells. Normally, when there is injury or infection, the cells of the immune system travel through the blood to the area where they are needed. They send out signals for more cells to join them and help fight off the infection or repair the damage. This causes pain, swelling, redness, warmth, and even loss of function in the affected area.

Systemic inflammation can be caused by autoimmune diseases like rheumatoid arthritis or psoriatic arthritis. In these cases, inflammation can happen in the joints, but it can also happen in other parts of the body (like the lungs, eyes, or blood vessel walls). In addition to symptoms of inflammation in the joints themselves, patients may get rashes, cough or trouble breathing, chest pain, or problems with circulation. Treating the cause of the active inflammation to calm the immune response can improve the pain.

Another cause of pain is damage from prior problems. If the inflammation from rheumatoid arthritis or psoriatic arthritis is not controlled quickly, it can lead to damage in the joints: inflammation can eat away at the bone and cause overactive bone growth to compensate. But this is all from inflammation that has come and gone: treating inflammation will not make this kind of pain go away. Damage can even happen without systemic inflammation. This is the case in diseases like osteoarthritis. In these situations, another trigger, like prior injury or overuse, causes damage to the joints. This, in turn, causes pain. The focus in treating pain from joint damage is on managing the symptoms and supporting joint function as much as possible. If this becomes impossible,

continued on next spread...

How You & Your Providers Can Work as a Team on Your Wellness Journey

ALISHA J. ZAVERI, MSPAS, PA-C

When receiving a diagnosis of a chronic autoimmune or musculoskeletal illness, many people may feel out of control and seek outside resources to help manage their condition. It is quite an adjustment to have to start taking a new medication—whether it is taking a daily pill, learning how to self-inject a biologic, or coming in for IV therapies in our Arise Infusion Therapy center.

Here at Arthritis and Rheumatism Associates, we as your providers want you to feel secure and comfortable with the pharmacologic management of your care. This includes asking all questions you have about these new medications you are taking. You may also have questions regarding non-pharmacologic treatment of your condition.

One of the most frequent questions we, as providers, hear is, “Are there any lifestyle changes or anything that I can do to prevent this from getting worse?” For Alisha Zaveri PA-C and Dr. Daniel El-Bogdadi, the PA/Physician team in Rockville and Fairfax, dietary and lifestyle changes play a key role in the management of autoimmune conditions.

Some patients with autoimmune conditions may find it beneficial to try a gluten-free diet. There are ongoing research that study the impact of gluten-free diets and rheumatic conditions. Based on these studies, some patients with rheumatic diseases, namely Sjogren’s syndrome and spondyloarthropathies, may benefit from a gluten-free diet. It is important to note that this is different from Celiac disease, which refers to the body’s production of antibodies against gliadin.

Gluten consumption has been linked to subclinical intestinal inflammation and the imbalance of microorganisms in the intestines in patients with spondylarthritis. There are also molecular mechanisms explaining the link between a gluten-free diet and Sjogren’s syndrome. Patients with Sjogren’s syndrome are seen to have a positive HLA DQ2 allele which is also associated with increased titers of Sjogren’s specific anti-SSA (Ro) and anti-SSB (La) antibodies. It was discovered that HLA DQ2 binds to these gluten peptides and initiates a chain of autoimmune and inflammatory responses.

It is important to note that specific dietary recommendations vary among individual patients. It is recommended that patients speak with their rheumatologist regarding any specific recommendations for their disease process. Patients may also want to try an elimination diet where they remove triggers such as gluten from their diet for 30 days and assess their body’s response to these changes. Many are surprised at how different their joints and overall energy levels feel once they make this change!

Autoimmune diseases are complex, and the symptoms can be debilitating. While many autoimmune diseases will require medication, a great deal of symptoms can be managed and healed through diet and lifestyle changes.

So, we encourage you to ask: how can I play a role in my care?

continued from previous spread...

Q. What does an anti-inflammatory diet consist of?

A. Anti-inflammatory diet includes:

- Green leafy vegetables
- Fruits
- Legumes such as beans, lentils, & peas
- Lean meats
- Fish that are high in omega-3 fatty acids (salmon, mackerel, tuna, sardines)
- Nuts such as almonds, walnuts

Q. What about turmeric?

A. Turmeric is a plant-derived from the ginger family that is often used as a spice in Southeast Asian cooking. It contains curcumin which has been shown in studies to have anti-oxidative and anti-inflammatory effects. These results are typically found at the molecular level, and there has not been strong data demonstrating this impact on inflammation diseases yet. A lot of turmeric products are poorly absorbed and not well metabolized in the body. Too much turmeric can lead to nausea, dizziness, and diarrhea. Modest use is harmless for most people and can be enjoyed in your cooking!



Q. What about gluten foods?

A. Gluten is a protein found in cereal grains such as wheat. Some people may have Celiac disease, an autoimmune condition causing gut inflammation from gluten exposure. Others may have a “gluten intolerance” without autoimmunity but also get diarrhea, constipation, and bloating when eating gluten foods. Most people can enjoy gluten foods without any impact to their arthritis. If you wonder about having issues with gluten, it may be worth a trial of holding bread, pasta, baked goods, beer, cereals, and others.



Research on natural remedies including different dietary regimens is a growing field and our understanding of it is constantly being updated. Consulting with a registered dietician and physical therapist is also great to complement a treatment plan with your rheumatologist!

Balance Strategies to Improve Safety & Reduce Fall Risk in the Home

THOMASINA (TOMI) LYEW, PT, DPT

We've all experienced losing our balance: we stood up too quickly, tripped on a crack in the sidewalk, or misstepped going upstairs, but when it starts to happen more frequently, it's normal to feel concerned.

Thomas, an active 90-year-old male who continues to work full-time as an engineer, found this to be the case when he started to feel unsteady during his daily walks. So why does this happen, even to those who lead an active lifestyle? As you age, physiological changes to your visual, somatosensory, and vestibular systems can affect balance.

First, visual perception may be impaired. Most commonly, you may experience a loss of ability to see close objects or small print due to presbyopia. To see close objects, the lens of your eye must bend or curve; however, with presbyopia, there is a hardening or loss of elasticity to the lens of your eye. This may cause a lack of feedback from your surroundings, causing increased difficulties in navigating your environment.

Second, there's a loss of somatosensation. Somatosensation consists of both proprioception and neural signaling through touch or physical contact. Proprioceptors are located within the joints and muscles, offering feedback regarding where your body parts are in space. For example, if you point your toes, you know your toes are pointed without having to look at your toes, thanks to proprioceptors. Because of the location of proprioceptors, it is common to have impaired proprioception with diagnoses related to the joints, such as hypermobility, rheumatoid arthritis, and osteoarthritis.



Accordingly, there is also a loss of neural receptors located in the soles of your feet. These receptors provide signaling from your feet to your brain regarding temperature, pain, texture, and touch. When there is a loss of feedback from proprioceptors and neural receptors, you may feel an instability through your knees or ankles, and it may become more difficult to determine terrain and variations in surface texture and quality.

Third, there is a loss of feedback from your vestibular system. The vestibular system functions to determine the position of your body — if you're lying down, sitting up, standing, spinning around in a circle, or doing a handstand. This is achieved by the saccules and utricles in your inner ear canal. These canals are filled with viscous fluid and use small stones to stimulate hair cells in the ear to detect motion and orientation. As you age, the number of ear hair follicles decreases as well as the magnitude of the saccule response.

Therefore, signaling from your vestibular system may be disrupted, causing instability with activity.

According to the National Council on Aging, more than 1 in 4 adults over the age of 65 will experience a fall each year, and 60% of falls occur in the home, so it is important to identify hazards to promote safety.

1. Remove clutter, such as boxes, shoes, shopping bags, or electrical cords
2. Ensure adequate lighting; use plug-in nightlights in your bathroom, hallways, or stairs for better guidance at night
3. Secure small area rugs with nonslip tape or resistant backing
4. Wear shoes to provide traction on hardwood or tile floors
5. Avoid loose clothing like baggy pants or long skirts
6. Add nonslip mats to showers or bathtubs

If you are afraid of falling or feel unsafe navigating your home or community, speak with your physician or healthcare provider. You may benefit from skilled intervention provided by a licensed physical therapist. Your therapist can help identify areas of instability, assess balance impairments, and identify underlying weaknesses or muscle imbalances contributing to fall risk.

And what about Thomas? Thomas has benefited from physical therapy to maintain his active and independent lifestyle, navigate the construction site for his next big project, and visit family abroad.

Gain Control of the Pain, continued...

treatments like injections or surgery may be needed to improve pain from joint damage.

In some cases, joints can hurt even when there is no inflammation or damage in the joint. This can happen in fibromyalgia. Fibromyalgia is a problem of abnormal pain signaling. Normally, when the body feels something, the signal for what is being felt travels to the brain. The brain then processes the signal and interprets it to tell the body what is going on. For example, if you stub your toe, the pain signal travels

from the toe to the brain and gets processed by the brain before you interpret it as, "Ouch! I stubbed my toe!" In fibromyalgia, the signals travel to the brain appropriately but the processing of those signals gets amplified. The same signal of a stubbed toe can be interpreted as something much more painful: "Ouch! My toe has been set on fire!" Treatment for pain from abnormal signaling focuses on retraining the brain to process signals more appropriately.

It may be a stretch to say that we should welcome pain as a signal that something needs to be adjusted. But, as a Buddhist saying has it, "Pain is inevitable, suffering is optional." The first step to healing is finding the cause of the pain so that the right treatment can help alleviate it.

One Pan Garlic Herb Chicken & Potatoes

INGREDIENTS:

- 4 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 tablespoon garlic
- 1 teaspoon fresh rosemary
- 1 teaspoon fresh thyme
- 600 grams fresh skinless chicken breast
- 4 potatoes, peeled and cut into chunks
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon pepper
- Olive oil for greasing the baking sheet

DIRECTIONS:

- 1) Preheat oven to 400°F/200°C. Lightly grease a baking tray with olive oil.
- 2) Finely chop the garlic and herbs and add to a small bowl. Stir in the olive oil.



- 3) Arrange the chicken and potatoes on the prepared baking sheet. Pour half of the garlic herb mixture over top. Season with salt and pepper. Bake for 15 minutes.
- 4) Remove pan from oven. Flip the chicken and stir the potatoes. Drizzle with remaining garlic herb oil.
- 5) Bake for an additional 10-15 minutes, until chicken is cooked through, and potatoes are crisp and golden.
- 6) Serve and enjoy!

FUN RHEUM:

E Y X N P Y Q R Z G R U S R C C A H V S
 O I M P O W T T O B Z S J A I A S G N O
 V T I I Y I A G D B E J N G R B F A W M
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 S R O T P E C O I R P O R P X Q T F P A
 M U S C U L O S K E L E T A L A U K K U

Find these words in the puzzle at left.
 Words can go in any direction.
 Words can share letters as they cross
 over each other.

- Strengthen
- Robbins
- Trevecca
- Cannabis
- Endocannabinoid
- Inflammation
- Turmeric
- Wellness
- Systemic
- Balance
- Somatosensation
- Proprioceptors
- Vestibular
- Yoga
- Flexibility
- Cortisol
- Mindfulness
- Therapeutic
- Ultrasound
- Musculoskeletal

RHEUMORS

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RHEUMORS

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The “Why” Behind Therapeutic Exercises

ALLISON BERGER, PT, DPT

As a physical therapist who treats patients living with chronic pain, I work daily to find movements and exercises that help my patients accomplish their goals. Exercise is one of the best ways we can all communicate with our bodies to create change. I often speak with my patients about how performing an exercise is like asking your body a question. With consistency and repetition, your body will start to respond with tissue changes: you do the bicep curls with a little more weight than what feels comfortable and your body responds by increasing the strength of the biceps so that it will be more comfortable to curl that weight in the future.

Exercise therapy can be used to accomplish many different goals. Some exercises help in the long term, and others can be helpful at the moment to reduce symptoms. Some exercises can help to mobilize or lubricate a joint; strengthen, stretch, tighten, or loosen a muscle or tendon; increase circulation in a body region; mobilize a nerve; or simply help reduce pain. If you’ve ever been in physical therapy and wondered why you do some exercises 10 times and others 3 times, some you hold for 3 seconds and others for 30 seconds, this is likely why. An ARA physical therapist would be happy to explain the rationale for your exercise prescriptions and help you to tailor your exercises to meet your goals.

A common goal in physical therapy is to improve strength so that muscles support joints better and daily activities become easier. With this goal in mind, a physical therapist would prescribe exercises to strengthen the muscles. Another common goal is to improve muscle extensibility to allow a person to move without their muscles holding them back, so exercises are prescribed to lengthen the muscles and



tendons. For other patients, the goal may be to learn safe weight-bearing exercises to improve bone mineral density that doesn’t worsen pain in an arthritic knee joint.

In most cases, the primary goal is pain relief. While strengthening and lengthening often help with pain in the long term, other movements can help with pain in the moment. There are exercises that promote joint lubrication to help with pain due to osteoarthritis or improve neural mobility to help with pain due to sciatica.

Regardless of the goals, an ARA physical therapist can find exercises and movements that help. To schedule a consultation with an ARA physical therapist, call 301.942.7600 or visit www.arapc.com.