

*Be a part of the search for a cure.*

Issue 9

Summer 2004

Welcome to the ninth edition of the *Johnston County Osteoarthritis Project Update*. We hope you find the newsletter interesting and informative.



## PROJECT UPDATE

### FROM THE MEDICAL DIRECTOR

**JOANNE JORDAN, MD, MPH**

In the 14 years that the Johnston County Osteoarthritis Project (JoCo OA) has been going on, we have discovered many interesting things about osteoarthritis (OA). We would like to tell you a little bit about what we have found out.

Looking at racial differences in OA, we found that African Americans are less likely to get hip OA than Caucasians. However, if an African American does get hip OA, they are just as likely as a Caucasian to have their hip OA get worse. African Americans and Caucasians are equally likely to get knee OA, but African Americans are more likely to have their knee OA get worse over time.

Other things that are often connected with OA are older age, female gender, joint injury, being overweight, a family history of OA, and certain jobs, especially farming and construction.

We have also been looking at things in the blood that may show that a person has OA. We have found that levels of some cartilage markers in the blood can be different in men and women and in African Americans and Caucasians.

Many of you had a diet interview as part of the JoCo OA Project. We have been looking at the effect of certain vitamins on OA. It is not clear yet which vitamins may make OA better and which may make it worse.

We will continue to let you know when we find out new things about OA. Please let us know if you move or change your phone number. We want to be able to send you any new information that we have!

We have some other studies on OA that are connected with the JoCoOA Project.

The **Buddy Study** (see page 3) is looking for people 45 years old and older with hand Osteoarthritis and people 57 years old or older without arthritis in their hands, knees, or hips. Qualified participants in the JoCo OA study may also join the Buddy Study.

The **ACE Study** (see page 2) is looking at how arthritis and emotional stress can adversely affect health, sometimes causing disability.

The **GOGO Study**, which looks at hereditary factors with OA, has started its follow-up phase. We will be contacting you if you were in the first part of this study.

In the last year, we have added about 900 new people to our study. These are people that moved into Johnston county or became 45 years or older in the last 10 years. We are getting ready for the next follow-up phase of the JoCo OA Project, and we are looking forward to seeing all of you again!

---

---

## TOENAIL QUESTION AND ANSWER

Many of you have questions about collecting your toenails. Here are some answers!

**Q:** Why are you collecting our toenails?

**A:** We are looking at the amounts of certain metals in the toenails. Metals in the body may affect OA.

**Q:** Why do we need to use the special clippers?

**A:** Metal can flake off regular clippers and it will keep us from getting a correct measurement of the amount of metal in your toenails. Our special clippers will give us a better idea of the amounts of metals in your toenails.

**Q:** Why can't you use our fingernails?

**A:** The fingernails grow faster than the toenails, so they are not as likely to hold the metals. Also, the fingernails are used more and so are more likely to be contaminated by metals from the things you touch.

**Q:** Why can't we bring our toenails in a plastic bag?

**A:** Air needs to be able to circulate around the toenails and air cannot move through a plastic bag.

**Q:** Why do you need a certain weight of toenails?

**A:** We are testing for many different metals in the toenails and we want to be sure that we have enough!

If we asked you to send us more toenails and you did not, you can still do so! Please use the special clippers we gave you, put the toenails in a paper envelope, and drop them in the mail!

## THE ARTHRITIS, COPING, AND EMOTIONS (ACE) STUDY



The **ACE (Arthritis, Coping and Emotions) Study** is part of the *Johnston County Osteoarthritis Project* that looks at how people respond to illness, especially arthritis, and what helps them to cope. It is an important study because dealing with arthritis takes emotional as well as physical resources, and we want to learn about what kinds of things help people to manage their health and lives. Many of you have already been interviewed by the ACE Study and will receive a call from us in the next year or two to participate again. Some of you just recently started as participants of the JoCo OA Project, and you will receive a call from us in the fall to see if you would like to participate in ACE. We have thoroughly enjoyed interviewing all of you and look forward to seeing you again or meeting you for the first time!

## HELPFUL DEFINITIONS

**Osteoporosis:** A bone disease affecting both men and women that causes the bones to become so thin that they can break during normal activities.

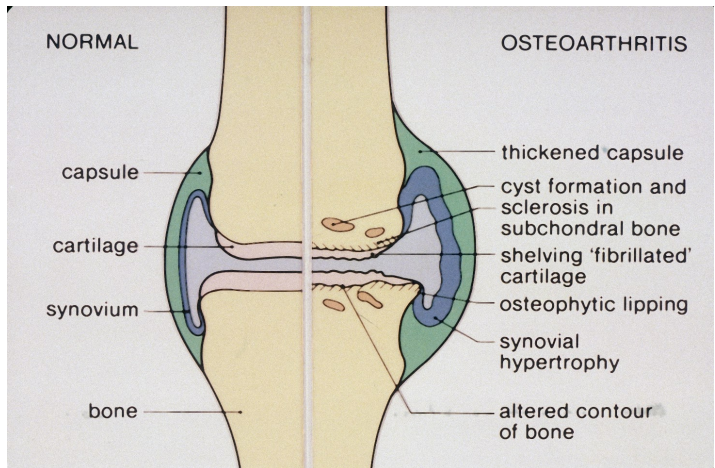
**Osteopenia:** A less severe thinning of the bones. Osteopenia puts people at risk of developing osteoporosis

**Osteoarthritis (OA):** Also called degenerative joint disease, it is the most common type of arthritis, associated with a breakdown of cartilage in the joints. The cartilage becomes stiff, loses elasticity, and may wear away, decreasing its shock-absorbing ability and causing pain. As cartilage wears away, the bones could rub against each other.

**Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA):** An autoimmune disease, in which the membranes lining the joints become inflamed, possibly leading to disability.

**Cartilage:** A tough, hardy tissue that covers and cushions the ends of bones where the joints are formed.

### A KNEE WITH AND WITHOUT OSTEOARTHRITIS



**Fibrous capsule:** A tough wrapping of the tendons and ligaments that surround the joint.

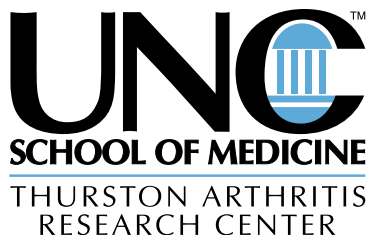
**Synovium:** A tissue that surrounds and protects the joints. It produces fluid (synovial fluid) that nourishes and lubricates the joints.

## THE BUDDY STUDY

The Thurston Arthritis Research Center at UNC is conducting a study called the BUDDY Study, which will compare the hereditary factors of 1,000 people with Osteoarthritis (Cases) to the genes of 1,000 people without Osteoarthritis (Controls). Some parts of this study are very similar to the JoCo OA Project; in fact, if you came in for your JoCo OA clinic visit in the past year and qualify for the BUDDY Study, you only need to have some blood drawn and a brief interview. Participants will be paid for their time.

To qualify as a Case, you must have three or more enlarged finger joints. **WE ESPECIALLY NEED CONTROLS!!** To qualify as a **CONTROL**, you must be 57 or older and **NOT HAVE** arthritis in your hands, hips or knees (unless it is the result of an injury). Participants in the BUDDY Study do not have to live in Johnston County. In addition to the Smithfield clinic site, we have sites in Burlington, Sanford, Durham and Chapel Hill.

For more information, please call the Johnston County Rural Health Research Office at (919) 934-1295 or toll free (877) 471-6266.



*Our mission is to investigate the causes, consequences and treatments of arthritis and rheumatic diseases and reduce their impact on patients, their families, and society.*

## THANK YOU! YOU HAVE MADE A DIFFERENCE!



We want to thank each and every one of you who have participated in the **Johnston County Osteoarthritis Project**. The knowledge we gain from your interview, clinic exam, test results, and diet interview will help us to understand why some people have a high risk for arthritis and disability, and what might be done to treat and/or prevent arthritis in the future.

### PLEASE REMEMBER TO:

- LET US KNOW IF YOUR ADDRESS OR PHONE NUMBER CHANGES – CALL US AT (919) 934-1295
- VISIT OUR NEW WEBSITE: [HTTP://TARC.MED.UNC.EDU](http://TARC.MED.UNC.EDU)

Address Service Requested

(919) 934-1295  
 Smithfield, North Carolina 27577  
 1327 North Bright Leaf Boulevard  
 Suite E-1, Noble Plaza  
 c/o Rural Health Research, Inc.

JOHNSTON COUNTY  
 Osteoarthritis Project Update

NON-PROFIT ORG  
 U.S. POSTAGE  
 PAID  
 PERMIT 177  
 CHAPEL HILL, NC