

# Successful Living with Arthritis

## Student Turned Teacher

### Meet Margaret Crowell

Seventy-six-year-old Margaret Crowell has a thriving social life. In fact, she meets with friends multiple times each week to laugh the time away and share in each other's triumphs and challenges. Margaret's visits are unique, however. "Laughter helps everything. And sometimes you just have to vent...especially if you're in pain."



A few years ago, Margaret was diagnosed with arthritis, a disease that affects more than 52.5 million other Americans, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Her doctor offered her different solutions, but as she recalls, "**I decided the best thing to do is move and move deliberately.**" Soon thereafter, Margaret attended a local exercise class sponsored by the Arthritis Foundation. After only a few classes, she felt a noticeable change in her arthritis symptoms and wanted to share these benefits with others. Margaret contacted the Arthritis Foundation about becoming a trained instructor in their exercise classes and helping participants learn to manage their arthritis symptoms in a gentle, natural way. **The courses cover a variety of range-of-**

**motion and endurance-building activities, relaxation techniques, and health education topics.** All of the exercises can be modified to meet participant needs, but that doesn't mean they're easy. As Margaret puts it, "When I went for the training, I thought those people were good, but I didn't think it would work. At the end of the day, I realized I had done a good thing! It was just that valuable."

### Laughter and Exercise as Medicine for Arthritis

Margaret now leads multiple exercise classes at a local senior center. She teaches participants gentle stretches and exercises that ease their pain while allowing them to talk about their own experiences. "It seems to get people's spirits up," she says. "**We support each other, talk about our pain, and share with each other.**"

Margaret has seen the benefits of these exercise classes first hand, both in participants' improvements and in her own disease management. "I had a fellow in my class who had gout. He came to the class with only one shoe on because he couldn't get a shoe over his other foot. He's doing so much better now and the swelling in his foot has really gone down," she says. "I want to **keep moving** because I'm really convinced that is what has kept me as well as I am."

Exercise classes are about your physical health **AND** your social support. Sharing with others is important when living with a chronic condition.

When asked what she would say to the other 52.5 million Americans living with arthritis, Margaret recommends finding a local exercise class like the ones she leads or beginning a walking regimen. But ultimately, she says the bottom line is to "**never, never, never give up.**"