



# DISASTER PREPAREDNESS: *People with Arthritis*

## DEFINITION:

According to the Arthritis National Research Foundation, arthritis is the leading cause of disability in America.

An estimated 50 million Americans, including 300,000 children, suffer from some form of arthritis. There are more than 100 different forms of the disease, including osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, juvenile arthritis, gout, fibromyalgia, and other autoimmune forms of arthritis. Arthritis is characterized by joint inflammation, which causes swelling and pain, and it can restrict mobility and cause fatigue, among other issues.

The most prevalent form of arthritis, Osteoarthritis, is the breakdown of joint tissues caused by injury or the wear and tear of everyday living as we age. Rheumatoid Arthritis is an autoimmune form of arthritis in which the body attacks self tissues beginning in the joints but moving throughout the body in later stages.

## LINKS WITH ADDITIONAL INFO:

[www.curearthritis.org](http://www.curearthritis.org)

[www.arthritis.org](http://www.arthritis.org)

<http://www.cdc.gov/arthritis/>

<http://arthritis.about.com/od/arthritismedications/a/Emergency-Preparedness-Stay-Ahead-On-Medications.htm>

<http://arthritis.about.com/od/news/a/evacuationchair.htm>

Hurricane Katrina and Arthritis Patients:

<http://www.hopkinsarthritis.org/arthritis-news/hurricane-katrina-and-arthritis-patients/>

## ABOUT NJGAINED:

The NJ Group for Access and Integration Needs in Emergencies and Disasters (NJ GAINED) acts as an advisory board to the New Jersey Office of Emergency Management (NJOEM) and the NJ Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness (OHSP) regarding issues affecting people with access and functional needs (AFN) in New Jersey before, during and after an emergency or disaster. Read more at: <http://www.state.nj.us/njoem/plan/special-needs-njsnap.html>

## FOR OEM/FIRST RESPONDERS:

- Conduct **outreach and education** with the arthritis community; interface with service providers/advocacy groups as part of preparedness planning.
- **Do not separate** a person from assistive devices or caregivers — individuals may carry a list/file of life/medical alert tag about what helps them remain independent. Have MOUs with home health aides and companies that provide medical equipment, in case assistance is needed.
- Offer an **area to recharge assistive/adaptive technology** as well as a safe place to store or refrigerate medications.

## FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS/COMMUNITY BASED ORGANIZATIONS:

- **Collaborate** on preparedness efforts with your local Office of Emergency Management (OEM) and first responders (*Police, Fire, EMS*)
- Educate consumers and their support network on disaster preparedness. Engage them in the planning process and encourage them to sign up with **Register Ready**: [www.registerready.nj.gov](http://www.registerready.nj.gov).
- **Have a plan (and a backup plan)** for staffing the agency during disasters and ensure all staff are aware of expectations/roles during an emergency. Keep a copy of emergency plans and lists of important phone numbers off-site.
- If your building has more than one floor, keep an **evacuation chair** on-site.
- **Reach out** to clients to see if they need assistance before, during and after a disaster.

## FOR CONSUMERS AND FAMILIES/CAREGIVERS:

- Create a **disaster/evacuation plan** and establish a support network of family and friends who will be part of your plan. Plan what to do in an emergency with your family, your caseworker, or others that help you. Practice plans!
- Shelters might be difficult to navigate. **Arrange alternatives to public shelter**, such as evacuating to a family member's house, friend's house, hotel/motel, etc.
- **Create a go-bag (disaster supply kit)**. Bags should include a flashlight, batteries, a crank radio, water, non-perishable food, medication (*enough for at least a week*), a change of clothes, a small amount of money, a list of emergency contacts (*family, doctors, agencies, insurance, etc.*), copies of important documents, assistive tools (*i.e., a dressing stick*), instant hot/cold packs or ointment for pain management, and an extra pair of glasses, if needed. Pack cords needed to charge wheelchair or phone and a small repair kit. Create a separate bag for service animals.
- **Label** all assistive devices with your name and phone # should they get separated.
- **Fill prescriptions** at a local big name pharmacy that can provide refills during emergencies. Always try to make sure you refill medication before running out so you have enough on hand if an emergency occurs.
- Consider disclosing to first responders or mass care staff that you or your loved one has arthritis.
- Learn about emergency preparedness online at [www.ready.nj.gov](http://www.ready.nj.gov)
- A John Hopkins University newsletter offered very specific advice for people with Arthritis, following Hurricane Katrina. Check out the link on the left, and consider whether you can apply any of these lessons learned to your own situation.

