

good at taking care of him that *even doing simple things had become difficult*. He wanted to begin taking care of himself again. When the phone rang, he had to race to beat her to it. But his body, crippled with arthritis, didn't race so well. So he dragged himself to the phone, hobbling Igor-style.

"She was so busy laughing that I actually accomplished my first physical goal," he says. "And while I was doing it, I was having fun. I realized it felt good, and from then on I made a point to develop my sense of humor so that I would be healthier."

Jacobson, now 40, was among 50 arthritis patients recently chosen in a nationwide search by the Arthritis Foundation for "Arthritis Heroes." These heroes are people who don't let the pain of arthritis prevent them from living full and meaningful lives.

The father of three and director of volunteer services at University Hospital in Tucson has been laughing his way through life. Not content with simple pleasures, Jacobson regularly pushes himself to new heights. He participates in physically challenging fund-raisers for the Arthritis Foundation. He's won awards for his determination and success at pedaling 50 miles – on a unicycle – for the Foundation, and last month he participated in a marathon walk/run in Dublin, Ireland.

When he's not working, training, competing or parenting, Jacobson is helping others. A noted speaker on humor therapy and health, Jacobson makes presentations to Arthritis Foundation support groups and conferences throughout the Southwest. He also serves as camp counselor for youths with arthritis and is co-coordinator of a support group for young adults with arthritis. In July he spent a week at a national conference for teens with the disease.

"One of my goals in life is to be an inspiration to teens with arthritis. I didn't have anyone like that at that

# Laughing at pain



David's fund-raising tactics for the Arthritis Foundation have included pedaling a unicycle 50 miles (left).

## *David's true miracle cure comes in a pill bottle he fills with his favorite jokes and one-liners*

age," he says. "It's nice to feel you have a purpose in life – that's where I get my passion and energy from."

When Jacobson complained of painfully swollen hips, back and wrists as a teen, his doctor blamed the problems on his athletic activi-

ties. Jacobson hopes to make the public, both patients and doctors, more aware of the disease and its symptoms so treatment can begin earlier for others.

Any pain, stiffness or swelling of the joints that lasts for more than two weeks merits a doctor's attention, according to the Arthritis Foundation. And don't wait for an arthritis diagnosis to occur to your doctor. If you suspect arthritis, Jacobson advises that you ask to see a rheumatologist.

Jacobson's condition, psoriatic arthritis, closely related to rheumatoid arthritis, is just one of more than 100 different diseases classified as a type of arthritis. While 43 million Americans have some type of arthritis, only 2.1 million are afflicted with rheumatoid arthritis, an autoimmune disease in which the joint lining becomes inflamed.

According to the Arthritis Foundation, a national non-profit founded in 1948 to help fund research and education about the hereditary disease, one in six people have some form of arthritic disability. Half of those affected aren't aware that relief of symptoms may be available to them, and more than half of those affected are under the age of 65.

It is the leading cause of disability, second only to heart disease as a cause of work disability.

Jacobson has learned to incorporate exercise, especially swimming, into his life to help relieve the stiffness. For some, medication can make a tremendous difference.

"The chemotherapy I'm on has been like a miracle drug for me," says Jacobson, adding that he takes only half the recommended dosage. His true miracle cure comes in another bottle, though – a pill bottle he fills with one-liners, favorite jokes he collects and reads when he needs a lit-

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