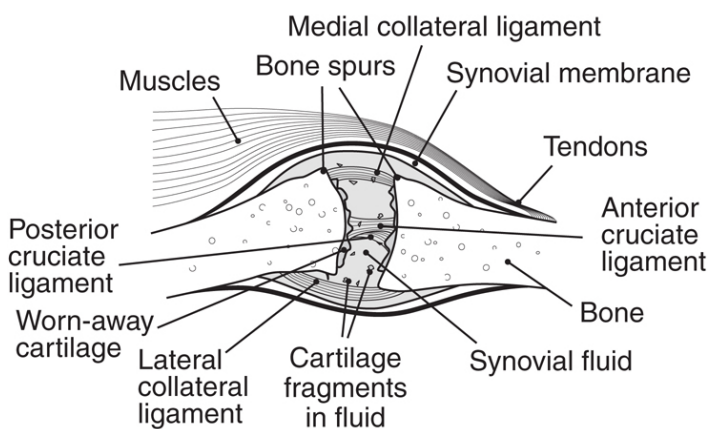




What is it?

Points To Remember About Osteoarthritis

- Osteoarthritis is a disease that damages the slippery tissue that covers the ends of bones in a joint. This allows bones to rub together, causing pain and stiffness.
- Osteoarthritis occurs most often in older people. Younger people sometimes get the disease after joint injuries.
- No single test can diagnose osteoarthritis. Doctors use several methods to diagnose the disease and rule out other problems.
- Treatments for osteoarthritis include medicines, nondrug pain relief techniques, surgery, and alternative therapies.
- Exercise, weight control, and other self-care activities can help you live with osteoarthritis.



A joint with severe osteoarthritis (representation)

Osteoarthritis is a disease that damages the slippery tissue that covers the ends of bones in a joint. This allows bones to rub together. The rubbing causes pain, swelling, and loss of motion of the joint. Over time, the joint may lose its normal shape.

The condition can cause bone spurs to grow on the edges of the joint. Bits of bone or cartilage can break off and float inside the joint space, which causes more pain and damage.

Unlike some other forms of [arthritis](#), osteoarthritis affects only joints and not internal organs. It is the most common type of arthritis.

Who gets it?

Osteoarthritis occurs most often in older people. Younger people sometimes get the disease after joint injuries.

What are the symptoms?

Osteoarthritis can occur in any joint. It occurs most often in the hands, knees, hips, and spine. Warning signs are:

- Stiffness in a joint after getting out of bed or sitting for a long time.
- Swelling or tenderness in one or more joints.
- A crunching feeling or the sound of bone rubbing on bone.

What causes it?

Osteoarthritis usually happens gradually over time. Some things that might make it more likely include:

- Being overweight.
- Getting older.
- Joint injury.
- Joints that are not properly formed.
- A genetic defect in joint cartilage.
- Stresses on the joints from certain jobs and playing sports.

Is there a test for it?

Most doctors use several methods to diagnose the disease and rule out other problems:

- Medical history.
- Physical exam.

- X-rays of the bone or images of the soft tissues in the joint.
- Other tests such as blood tests or exams of the fluid in the joints.

How is it treated?

There are many treatments that can help relieve pain and help you live with osteoarthritis. You should talk to your doctor about the best treatments for you, which can include:

- Medicines.
- Nondrug pain relief techniques.
- Complementary and alternative therapies.
- Surgery.

Who treats it?

Treating osteoarthritis requires a team effort involving you and several types of health care professionals. These may include:

- Primary care doctors, such as a family physician or internal medicine specialist, who coordinates care between the different health providers and treats other problems as they arise.
- Rheumatologists, who specialize in arthritis and other diseases of the bones, joints, and muscles.
- Orthopaedists, who specialize in treatment and surgery for bone and joint diseases.
- Physical therapists, who help improve joint function.
- Occupational therapists, who teach ways to protect joints, minimize pain, perform activities of daily living, and conserve energy.
- Dietitians, who teach about good diets and maintaining a healthy weight.
- Nurse educators, who help you understand your condition and help start treatment plans.
- Rehabilitation specialists, who help you make the most of your physical potential.
- Licensed acupuncture therapists, who reduce pain and improve physical functioning by inserting fine needles into the skin at specific points on the body.
- Psychologists or social workers, who help with social challenges caused by medical conditions.
- Chiropractors, who focus treatment on the relationship between the body's structure, mainly the spine, and its functioning.
- Massage therapists, who press, rub, and otherwise manipulate the muscles and other soft tissues of the body.

Living With It

There are some things you can do to help you live with osteoarthritis, including:

- Exercise can reduce joint pain and stiffness. It also helps with losing weight, which reduces stress on the joints. You should speak to your doctor about a safe, well-rounded exercise program.
- Weight control, particularly losing weight, can reduce stress on joints.
- Heat and cold therapies can reduce joint pain and swelling.
- Nutritional supplements such as glucosamine and chondroitin sulfate may help improve symptoms in some people.
- Patient education programs, arthritis self-management programs, and arthritis support groups can help you learn about self-care and improve your good-health attitude.

For more info

U.S. Food and Drug Administration

Toll free: 888-INFO-FDA (888-463-6332)

Website: <https://www.fda.gov>

[Drugs@FDA](https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cder/daf) at <https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cder/daf>. [Drugs@FDA](https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cder/daf) is a searchable catalog of FDA-approved drug products.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics

Website: <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs>

NIH Osteoporosis and Related Bone Diseases~ National Resource Center

Website: <https://www.bones.nih.gov>

National Institute on Aging

Website: <https://www.nia.nih.gov>

American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons

Website: <https://www.aaos.org>

American College of Rheumatology

Website: <https://www.rheumatology.org>

Arthritis Foundation

Website: <https://www.arthritis.org>

American Physical Therapy Association

Website: <https://www.apta.org>

If you need more information about available resources in your language or other languages, please visit our webpages below or contact the NIAMS Information Clearinghouse at NIAMSInfo@mail.nih.gov.

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