



## Points To Remember About Osteoarthritis

- Osteoarthritis is a joint disease in which the tissues in the joint break down over time. It is the most common type of arthritis and is more common in older people.
- Common symptoms of osteoarthritis include joint pain, stiffness, and swelling, as well as changes in how the joint moves and feeling like the joint is loose or unstable.
- Treatment of osteoarthritis usually includes exercising, maintaining a healthy weight, wearing braces to help with stability, and taking medications, if prescribed.
- You can do many things to help you live with osteoarthritis, including using hot and cold therapies, avoiding repeated movements, and taking a class to help you learn about the condition.

## What is osteoarthritis?

Osteoarthritis is a joint disease that happens when the tissues in the joint break down over time. It is the most common type of arthritis and is more common in older people.

People with osteoarthritis usually have joint pain and, after rest, stiffness (inability to move easily) for a short period of time. The most commonly affected joints include the:

- Hands (ends of the fingers and at the base and ends of the thumbs).
- Knees.
- Hips.
- Neck.
- Lower back.

Osteoarthritis affects each person differently. For some people, osteoarthritis does not affect day-to-day activities. For others, it causes significant pain and disability.

## Who gets osteoarthritis?

Anyone can get osteoarthritis, but it is more common as people age. Women are more likely than men to have osteoarthritis, especially after age 50.

Younger people can also develop osteoarthritis, usually because of a joint injury or problem with how the joint formed.

## What are the symptoms of osteoarthritis?

The symptoms of osteoarthritis often begin slowly and usually begin with one or a few joints.

The common symptoms of osteoarthritis include:

- Pain when using the joint, which may get better with rest. For some people, in the later stages of the disease, the pain may be worse at night.
- Joint stiffness, usually lasting less than 30 minutes, in the morning or after resting for a period of time.
- Swelling in and around the joint, especially after you use the area a lot.
- Changes in the ability to move the joint.
- Feeling that the joint is loose or unstable.

As your symptoms get worse over time, some activities may be difficult to do, such as:

- Stepping up.
- Getting on or off the toilet or in and out of a chair.
- Gripping a pan.
- Walking across a parking lot.

Pain and other symptoms of osteoarthritis may lead you to feel tired, have problems sleeping, and feel depressed.

## What causes osteoarthritis?

Changes in joint tissue can cause parts of the joint to break down and usually happens little by little over time. This does not happen because of simple wear and tear on the joints. Certain factors may make it more likely for you to develop the disease, including:

- Aging.
- Being overweight or obese.
- History of injury or surgery to a joint.
- Overuse from repeated movements of the joint.
- Joints that do not form correctly.
- Family history of osteoarthritis.

## Is there a test for osteoarthritis?

There is no single test for osteoarthritis. Your doctor may do the following to see if you have the condition:

- Ask for a medical history, and give you a physical exam.
- Order images of your joint using x-rays or magnetic resonance imaging (MRI).
- Run blood tests to rule out other causes for symptoms.
- Take joint fluid samples to look for other causes of joint pain, such as infection or [gout](#).

## How is osteoarthritis treated?

The goals of your treatment for osteoarthritis include:

- Reducing pain and other symptoms.
- Improving joint function.
- Stopping the disease from getting worse.
- Maintaining your quality of life.

Treating osteoarthritis usually includes:

- Exercising, which can lower joint pain and stiffness and increase flexibility and muscle strength. Speak to your doctor or physical therapist about a safe, well-rounded exercise program. Remember to start any exercise program slowly and take the time to adjust to the new level of activity.
- Managing your weight to help lower the stress on joints. In addition, if you are overweight or obese, losing weight can help to lower pain, prevent more injury, and improve movement in your joints. This can be especially helpful for your knees or hips.
- Using braces or orthotics that your doctor prescribes and that are fitted by a health care professional.

Some people may need medications to help manage the symptoms of osteoarthritis. Your doctor may recommend surgery if all other treatments tried have not helped your osteoarthritis. However, surgery is not right for everyone, and your doctor will decide if it's best for you.

## Who treats osteoarthritis?

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

- Rheumatologists, who specialize in arthritis and other diseases of the bones, joints, and muscles.

- Chiropractors, who focus treatment on the relationship between the body's structure, mainly the spine, and its functioning.
- Dietitians, who teach about nutrition and maintaining a healthy weight.
- Nurse educators, who help you understand your condition and help start treatment plans.
- Occupational therapists, who teach ways to protect joints, minimize pain, perform activities of daily living, and conserve energy.
- Orthopaedic surgeons, who specialize in treatment and surgery for bone and joint diseases.
- Physiatrists (physical, medicine, and rehabilitation specialists), who supervise exercise programs.
- Physical therapists, who help improve joint function.
- 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.
- Psychologists or social workers, who help with psychosocial challenges caused by medical conditions.

## Living with osteoarthritis

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

- Heat and cold therapies can lower joint pain.
- A cane or walker can help you move around safely, provide stability, and lower pain. If you have arthritis in your hands, you may find it helpful to use devices to help you grip, such as jar openers.
- Try to avoid repeated motions, such as frequent bending.
- Shoe inserts or braces can help support your joint and help lower pain and pressure on the area. This can be helpful when you stand or walk.
- See your health care provider to talk about your symptoms and treatment. You may want to join a class to learn about osteoarthritis and how to manage the symptoms to allow you to live an active lifestyle.
- Support groups, both online and in your community, can help you cope and offer tips on how to manage having the disease and live a healthy lifestyle.

## For More Info

## **U.S. Food and Drug Administration**

Toll free: 888-INFO-FDA ([888-463-6332](tel: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>

## **National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health**

Website: <https://nccih.nih.gov>

## **National Institute on Aging**

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

## **NIH Osteoporosis and Related Bone Diseases ~ National Resource Center**

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

## **American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons**

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

## **American College of Rheumatology**

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

## **American Physical Therapy Association**

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

## **Arthritis Foundation**

Website: <https://www.arthritis.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](mailto:NIAMSInfo@mail.nih.gov).

- [Asian Language Health Information](#)
- [Spanish Language Health Information](#)