

What is Osteoarthritis

Osteoarthritis is a disease that causes the cartilage in your joints to break down. Cartilage is a smooth substance that serves as a cushion between the bones thereby protecting the ends of your bones and helps your joints move. When the top layer of cartilage breaks down and wears away, the bones under the cartilage rub together. Osteoarthritis becomes common as people get older. To diagnose this disease, your doctor will ask about your health history and perform an exam. X-rays may also be needed.



Symptoms

Osteoarthritis can affect any joint, but women tend to get it in their hands. Weight-bearing joints, such as the hip and knee, are often affected in both men and women. Some of the more common symptoms of this disease include:

- ❖ Pain while standing or walking short distances, climbing up or down stairs, or getting in and out of chairs.

- ❖ Joint pain and stiffness - Long periods of rest or using a joint too long or too hard can make pain and stiffness worse.
- ❖ Knee pain with activity, Stiffness in your knee joint after getting out of bed.
- ❖ Swelling in one or more areas of the knee
- ❖ A grating sensation or crunching feeling when you use your knee
- ❖ Weak muscles or wobbly joints.
- ❖ Joints that have lost normal shape and motion.

What you can do to feel better

Osteoarthritis is an ongoing problem. But it doesn't have to keep you from leading an active life. You can control symptoms by exercising and watching your weight. Using special tools also helps make life easier. Be sure to see your doctor as requested for checkups and lab work.

Make Exercise Part of Your Life

Gentle exercise can help lessen your pain. Keep the following in mind when you workout:

- ❖ Choose exercises that improve joint motion and make your muscles stronger. Your doctor or a physical therapist may suggest a few.
- ❖ Try low-impact sports, such as walking, hiking, or doing exercises in a warm pool.



Increasing muscle strength and joint motion can help you feel better

- ❖ Don't push yourself too hard at first. Slowly build up your endurance over time.
- ❖ When pain and stiffness increase, cut back on your workout.

Use Special Tools

Even simple tasks can be hard to do when your joints hurt. The special tools and aids listed here can make things easier by reducing strain and protecting your joints. Ask your health provider where to find these and other helpful tools:



- ❖ Long-handled reachers or grabbers.
- ❖ Jar openers and button threaders.
- ❖ Splints for your wrists or other joints.
- ❖ Large grips for pencils, garden tools, and other hand-held objects.

Watch Your Weight

If you weigh more than you should, your weight-bearing joints are under extra pressure. This makes your symptoms worse. To reduce pain and stiffness, try shedding a few pounds. The tips below may help:

- ❖ Start a weight-loss program with the help of your doctor.
- ❖ Ask your friends and family for support.
- ❖ Join a weight-loss group.

Medications may help

Medications can't cure osteoarthritis, but they can help relieve pain and stiffness. Your doctor may prescribe one or more medications. He or she may also suggest over-the-counter ones that you can take.

Tips for Taking Medications

Your doctor can adjust the type or dose of your medication as needed. For the best results, follow these tips:

- ❖ Keep a list of all your medications.
- ❖ Take your medications only as directed.
- ❖ Don't skip a dose or stop taking your medications without talking to your doctor.
- ❖ Find out if your medications should be taken with food.



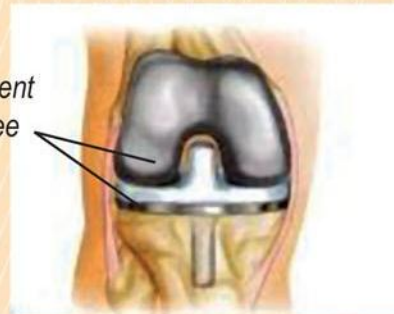
Carry your medications with you. That way, you won't miss a dose.

- ❖ Tell your doctor if you have side effects, such as dizziness or stomach problems.
- ❖ Have any lab tests ordered by your doctor. The results help your doctor to monitor how your medications are affecting you.

If Surgery is Needed

For people with severe joint damage, surgery can decrease pain and improve movement. Joint replacement is the most common surgery used to treat osteoarthritis. Joints in the knee, hip, and shoulder are replaced more often.

Joint replacement of the knee



Arthritis Hurts

Talking helps

Don't suffer in silence

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Living With OSTEOARTHRITIS



Controlling Joint Pain