



ARTHRITIS

Your Guide for Pain Management and Prevention

What Is Arthritis?

Arthritis causes stiffness and pain in the joints. It is a chronic condition and can lead to permanent joint damage, disability and difficulty working and carrying out everyday activities. There are many different types of arthritis, the causes of which are unknown.

Your best tool: A positive outlook. Optimism has been proven to help people manage nearly all chronic conditions, and arthritis is no exception.

What Else Causes Joint Pain?

Strain and overuse: Sports injury, repetitive stress (such as from typing on a keyboard, playing a musical instrument, cutting hair or working with tools and machinery), lifting incorrectly and having poor posture are major causes of joint pain. Repeated overuse and strain may also cause conditions such as bursitis (inflammation of small sacs within the joint) and tendonitis (inflammation of a tendon, the connective tissue around a joint).

Other rheumatic conditions: Systemic lupus erythematosus (lupus), scleroderma, fibromyalgia, spondylitis and Reiter's syndrome are examples of chronic rheumatic conditions. They may have symptoms similar to arthritis but differ in important ways and have specific treatments.

Diagnosis: If joint pain and inflammation do not go away or keep you from performing regular activities, see your health care provider. Your provider will take a detailed medical and family history and perform tests such as X-rays and blood work to determine whether you have arthritis.



Arthritis Facts

Osteoarthritis is the most common type. It is most commonly seen in middle-aged and older people, although it can happen at any age from joint injury or overuse. It usually affects the knees, hips and spine and can range from very mild to severe. A degenerative disease, osteoarthritis gradually wears away the cartilage covering the ends of the bones as the joint is used.

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) mainly affects people over 30, although it can strike at any age. RA produces chemicals that destroy the joint surface and inflame both the joint lining and the tissue around the joint. It mostly affects the hands and feet, although the hips, knees and elbows may also be affected. Joints can lose their shape and alignment, resulting in pain and loss of movement.

The good news: Although there is no cure for arthritis, many treatments and self-care techniques are available. Your first step to greater freedom of movement and less pain is learning all you can about the condition.

How Is Arthritis Treated?

Medication

Over-the-counter drugs reduce the pain and inflammation of arthritis, including:

- Aspirin • Ibuprofen • Naproxen

You can also discuss prescription anti-inflammatory drugs with your health care provider. Since some cause more stomach irritation or other side effects than others, discuss your options with your provider.

For treatment of RA, special prescription drugs that suppress the immune system and minimize joint damage may also be used.

Joint Protection

- Tools to make reaching, opening and dressing easier
- Railings and extenders for household and workplace furniture
- Canes, splints, braces and orthotics to support joints
- Padded grips for tools

Joint protection may also involve learning new ways to perform activities that do not stress joints.

Surgery

- Arthroscopic surgery (a small scope and other instruments are inserted in the joint)
- Bone fusion (where bones in the joint are fused together)
- Arthroplasty (removal or replacement of a damaged joint)



Beat Arthritis By Staying Active

The key to arthritis management is finding balance between activity and rest – exercising too much may stress sensitive joints, while being too sedentary can cause stiffness and immobility. **Try this:**

Stretching and gentle movement. Yoga, Tai chi and stretching are easy on the joints and keep joints fluid and supple.

Aerobic activity. Exercises such as riding a bike, swimming and water aerobics keep the heart healthy and the muscles strong without putting too much pressure on joints.

Remember: Listen to your body. Stop exercising if you experience sharp pain and don't "work through" joint discomfort. Find activities that are gentle on your body and take them at a comfortable pace.

Protect Your Joints

- **Make sure your workspace is ergonomically correct.**
- **Lift correctly.**
- **Stand and sit up straight.**
- **Wear the right protective equipment.**
- **Exercise regularly.**
- **Get plenty of sleep.**
- **Eat a balanced diet.**

Remember: Taking good care of yourself overall helps keep your joints working smoothly.

