

Arthritis Answer Guide

Managing Joint Pain

**FOR MORE INFORMATION
ABOUT ARTHRITIS, CONTACT
THESE ORGANIZATIONS:**

THE ARTHRITIS FOUNDATION

www.arthritis.org or (404) 872-7100

**THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
ARTHRITIS & MUSCULOSKELETAL
AND SKIN DISEASES**

www.niams.nih.gov or (877) 226-4267

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**AMERICAN ACADEMY OF
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WHAT IS ARTHRITIS ?



Arthritis is a disease that occurs in the body's joints. Your joints are the space where bones meet. For example, your knee joint, which is the largest joint in your body, is the meeting place of your thigh bone, shin bones, and knee cap. Other joints are found in the neck, shoulder, elbow, wrist, hands, hips, spine, knees, ankles and feet.

When arthritis develops, the space inside the joint becomes inflamed, which can cause pain, stiffness, and tenderness. Over time, arthritis can cause permanent damage to the joints.

More than 50 million Americans have some kind of arthritis.

If you have joint pain or any other arthritis-like symptoms, be sure to see your health care provider. Different kinds of arthritis respond to different kinds of treatment, so it's important to receive an accurate diagnosis. In some cases, early treatment can help slow the course of the disease, so don't ignore your symptoms.

WHAT ARE THE MOST COMMON SYMPTOMS OF ARTHRITIS ?



Arthritis can cause some of the following symptoms:

- Pain, tenderness, or stiffness in a joint
- Swelling or warmth in a joint
- Redness or tenderness of the skin over the joint
- Difficulty moving the joint
- Fever
- Unexplained weight loss, rashes, or breathing trouble

Arthritis symptoms can come on suddenly or after periods of stillness, such as sleeping or sitting in a car for a long drive. Symptoms may come and go, or they may last for longer periods of time. Your health care provider can help you understand what's causing your specific symptoms.



WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT KINDS OF ARTHRITIS ?



There are many conditions that affect the joints and the tissue that surround them. But these are the main kinds of arthritis:

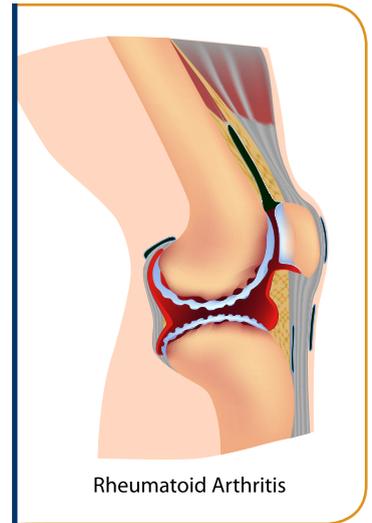
Osteoarthritis

Also known as OA, osteoarthritis is the most common kind of arthritis. Some 27 million Americans have it. Most often, OA occurs in the fingers, knees, spine, and hips. OA develops when age, injury, or being overweight cause the breakdown of cartilage in a joint.

Cartilage is a strong, fibrous connective tissue. It acts as a kind of cushion in your joints that prevents bones from rubbing together. When this padding wears away or gets worn or damaged, the space inside the joint becomes inflamed and pain can occur. Over time, the joint can get damaged. At first, pain can come while walking, squatting, or climbing stairs. After a while, it may occur while sitting or lying still.

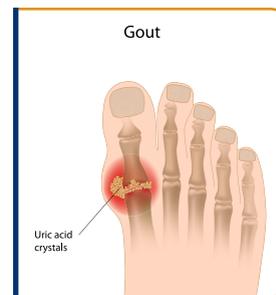
Rheumatoid Arthritis

Also known as RA, rheumatoid arthritis develops when your immune system attacks the cells in your joints. It occurs most often in the hands and feet. But it can lead to pain and damage in joints anywhere in the body. It may also cause harm in other places, such as your heart, eyes, muscles, or blood vessels.



Juvenile Arthritis

Arthritis and related conditions that occur in children are called juvenile arthritis.



Gout

This kind of arthritis results from a buildup of uric acid in your body. Uric acid is formed by your body during the process of digesting certain foods, such as those that contain a substance called purine. It's the job of your kidneys to filter uric acid out

of your blood. But in some people, uric acid builds up. Drinking alcohol, being overweight, and taking certain medicines may make gout worse. Gout pain typically starts in the big toe, and can spread to other joints. Flare-ups can be very painful. Eating certain foods, such as meat, poultry, and seafood, can trigger gout pain.

Fibromyalgia

People with fibromyalgia can experience a wide range of symptoms, including arthritis-like pain and tenderness. Fibromyalgia is not a true form of arthritis, because it doesn't cause inflammation or damage in joints. However, it is considered an arthritis-related condition because it can cause arthritis-like pain.

WHO IS AT RISK FOR GETTING ARTHRITIS ?

People are more likely to get arthritis as they get older. Although both men and women can develop arthritis, they may get different types of arthritis. Women have a higher risk of developing rheumatoid arthritis, for example, and men have higher rates of gout.

Several other factors can increase your chances of getting arthritis:

- Working at a job that requires repetitive motion, such as squatting.
- Being overweight or obese. This boosts risk because carrying around excess weight strains joints—especially the knees.
- Having a history of joint injuries or infections.
- Having a family history of some kinds of arthritis, such as RA.
- Cigarette smoking. In the 2014 Surgeon General's Report, RA was added to the list of diseases that can be caused by smoking. Smokers are more likely to get RA than non-smokers. And if you already have RA, smoking can make your RA medicines less effective. If you smoke, quitting now may make a difference.

Can arthritis be prevented?

There is no sure way to prevent arthritis. But you can lower your risk by taking these important steps:

- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Don't smoke.
- Take care not to injure your joints, either through repetitive movements or accidents, falls, or sports injuries.

HOW IS ARTHRITIS DIAGNOSED ?

Your health care provider uses a range of information to decide whether you have arthritis, including:

Your health history

Your provider will ask you about your past and current medical conditions, your health history, and what medications you take.

Your injury history

OA can develop years or even decades after an injury to a joint. So your provider will ask you about any joint injuries you've had.

Your family's health history

Some kinds of arthritis have a genetic link. So your provider will talk with you about the health of your siblings, parents, and other family members.

A physical exam

In addition to assessing your overall health, your provider will check on how well you're able to move your joints.

A discussion of your symptoms

Your provider will want to know what arthritis-like symptoms you've had, how long/often you've had them, and what kind of discomfort you feel. To make this discussion easier, fill out the Arthritis Symptom Diary in the back of this brochure and bring it with you to your appointment.

Test results

To learn more about what's happening inside your body, your provider may order blood tests, an X-ray, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), or other diagnostic tests.

HOW IS ARTHRITIS TREATED ?

There is no cure for the most common kinds of arthritis. But early treatment can slow down the course of some kinds of arthritis, such as RA. The kind of treatment your health care provider recommends is based on what type of arthritis you have and how much discomfort it causes. Although you don't need a prescription for over-the-counter medicines, it's best to talk with your health care provider if you're taking them for joint pain.

Health care providers use a range of medicines to help control arthritis pain, inflammation, and other symptoms.

They include:

Topical pain relievers

Usually these are creams that can be rubbed into the skin over a painful joint. They may help with mild symptoms.

Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs

Known as NSAIDs, these medicines are available as prescription-strength or over-the-counter. Non-prescription NSAIDs include aspirin, ibuprofen, and naproxen. NSAIDs help with pain and inflammation, but may cause stomach upset.

Acetaminophen

Also available without a prescription, acetaminophen treats pain but not inflammation. It tends not to cause stomach pain.

Narcotic pain relievers

Available only by prescription, these medicines relieve pain but not inflammation.

Steroids

These strong prescription drugs treat pain and inflammation. They can cause certain side-effects, so they're not the right choice for every patient.

Injections

Injecting medicine directly into the joint can relieve stubborn arthritis symptoms.

Disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drugs

Also known as DMARDs, these powerful drugs can slow the inflammation caused by RA.

ARE ALTERNATIVE TREATMENTS SAFE AND EFFECTIVE ?

Researchers are looking into the safety and usefulness of alternative treatments. So far, they've found that the dietary supplements glucosamine and chondroitin may help lessen OA pain. But they don't seem to reduce damage to cartilage. There is also some evidence that acupuncture may help some people with arthritis.

If you're interested in trying alternative treatments, talk with your health care provider first. Make sure that they are safe and that they don't interfere with any medications you take.



WHAT OTHER TREATMENTS ARE USED FOR ARTHRITIS ?

Medicine isn't the only way to manage arthritis. These are some other ways that health care providers help people with arthritis relieve their symptoms:

Physical therapy

Also known as PT, physical therapy uses movement and education to relieve discomfort and increase a patient's ability to move and function. A physical therapist can also advise you on how to use exercise to feel better. Ask your arthritis care provider if PT is a good choice for you. Most health insurance plans cover PT.

Comfort measures

Arthritis discomfort may be reduced by using ice packs or heating pads, taking warm showers, stretching, or resting during flare-ups. A health care provider or physical therapist can give specific advice about comfort measures that will work best for you.

Weight loss

Excess weight strains your joints. Losing even a small amount of weight can bring relief. For example, shedding just 11 pounds can lower your risk of developing osteoarthritis of the knee. Losing just 5% of body weight (10 pounds in a 200-pound person) can reduce arthritis pain and disability.

Surgery

Not everyone with arthritis needs surgery. But when a joint is damaged, surgery can make a difference. The most common kind of arthritis surgery is for joint replacement. A surgeon removes your joint and replaces it with a new joint made of plastic and/or metal. More than 1 million Americans have knee or hip replacement surgery each year.

DOES EXERCISE HELP WITH ARTHRITIS ?



For most people, exercise does help. It may seem that rest is the best way to cope with arthritis pain and stiffness. Sometimes rest is best, but research has found that people with arthritis feel better when they get up and move. Exercise can help reduce arthritis pain, ease stiffness, increase energy, boost mood, and improve your ability to move around. It can strengthen the muscles that support joints and help reduce swelling.

For people with arthritis, the recommended daily exercise goal is 30 minutes a day, five or more days of the week. This may sound like a lot, especially if you don't exercise now. Don't worry: You can start with just a few minutes a day of gentle movement and increase your activity levels over time. Generally, people with arthritis do best with low-impact activities such as walking, swimming, and cycling. During arthritis flare-ups, simple motions that gently move the joint may be helpful.

Learning how to exercise safely can not only help relieve arthritis pain, but it can cut the risk of heart disease, diabetes, and other chronic diseases.

To find out more about what kind of exercise is best for you, talk with your health care provider. Another great resource is a physical therapist, who can recommend specific moves for stretching, strengthening, and improving flexibility.

