

Joint Health

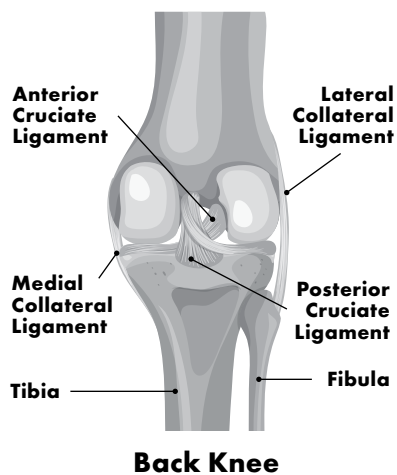
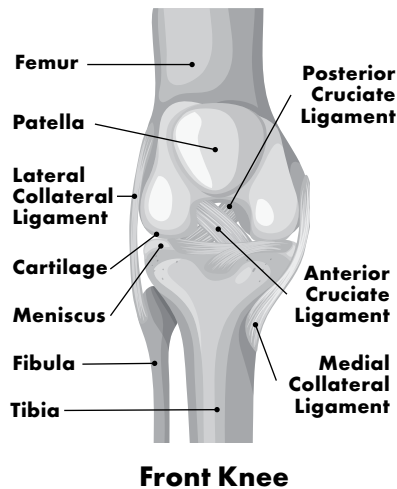
About Joint Health

Our joints make every movement possible. Understanding what our joints are made of, how they work and what can affect them will help us better care for them throughout our lifetime.

Joint Anatomy

Joints are where two or more bones meet. They let our body move, stay flexible and help support it. Healthcare providers group joints into three types:

- **Fibrous joints** are made of thick, connective tissue woven together like fiber. Some are flexible; others are not. They connect bones like the plates in the skull and bones in the lower leg.
- **Cartilaginous joints** have a layer of cartilage that cushions and connects bones. These joints can move a little, like those near our pelvis.
- **Synovial joints** have cartilage that cushions bones and slippery synovial fluid that keeps movement smooth within the joint's protective lining. These are very flexible, allowing the most movement, and include knees and elbows (hinge joints) and shoulders and hips (ball-and-socket joints).



FAST FACTS

- There are about 360 joints in the human body.
- Genetics play a primary role in joint health. Having a relative with a chronic joint condition can increase your risk.
- Nearly 60 million adults and children in the U.S. have doctor-diagnosed arthritis.
- Top reasons people with arthritis say they want to lose or manage weight: to feel better and to reduce stress on their joints.
- People with arthritis say stress, poor sleep and illness or injury are the top causes of unexpected weight gain.

What Affects Joint Health?

- **Age.** Risk of joint disease like arthritis increases as we age, but it's not a given. And it's not just in older people. In fact, around 300,000 children in the U.S. have juvenile arthritis.
- **Genetics.** Genes play a key role in joint health. Having a relative with joint problems can increase your risk for similar issues.
- **Injury.** A joint injury raises the risk of post-traumatic osteoarthritis (PTOA), or arthritis brought on by injury, five to seven times, often within 10 years of the injury. Young, active people, in sports or in the military, for example, are more likely to get PTOA. Two common injuries are anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) tears and meniscus tears in the knee.

For More Information

About Arthritis:

arthritis.org/about-arthritis

Arthritis Foundation Helpline:

800-283-7800

arthritis.org/helpline

- **Weight & Lifestyle.** Every extra pound equals 4 pounds of pressure on weight-bearing joints. Excess fat, smoking and vaping also increase body-wide inflammation, which harms joints and raises the risk of many chronic conditions.
- **Arthritis.** Nearly 60 million adults and children in the U.S. have arthritis. It's the most common chronic joint condition and a leading cause of disability. There are more than 100 different types of arthritis. Osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, gout and psoriatic arthritis are the most common.
- **Other Conditions.** Lupus, an autoimmune condition; tendinitis, inflammation of the thick, fibrous cords that attach muscle to bone; bursitis, inflammation of the small, fluid-filled sacs (bursae) that cushion joints; and many other conditions can affect joint health.

What Can I Do to Care for My Joints?

- **Stay Active: It reduces joint pain and inflammation.** Even short sessions of activity can lower pain and inflammation and trigger the release of anti-inflammatory proteins. One study found that just 20 minutes of moderate walking was enough to reduce inflammation.
- **Eat Well: It helps control inflammation and maintain a healthy weight.** A diet low in fat and high in fiber and anti-inflammatory foods — like the Mediterranean diet — may help control inflammation and keep weight in check, helping joints stay healthy. It also reduces the risk of many related conditions, like heart disease and diabetes.
- **Stay Positive: It reduces stress, anxiety and depression.** When stress hormones spike, joint pain can worsen. More pain can create a vicious cycle: more stress and anxiety, less activity and sleep, weight gain. Chronic joint conditions are also linked to depression, which can worsen the cycle and lower quality of life. A positive outlook and socializing can reduce these effects. If depressive thoughts persist, seek help from a mental health professional.
- **Sleep Well: It lowers pain levels and improves mood.** Between 67% and 88% of people with chronic pain have trouble with sleep. Being exhausted also can cause us to be less active and less likely to enjoy fun, social activities. Studies show getting at least seven hours a night can lower our perception of pain and improve mood. If you struggle with sleep, talk to your doctor.
- **Get Checked: It improves overall health and quality of life.** Getting regular healthcare check-ups and speaking up if you have joint pain can catch issues early. Early diagnosis and treatment help prevent joint damage and improve quality of life. If you have a family history of joint problems, tell your doctor.

FAQs

How can I describe my joint pain to my doctor?

Tell them where it hurts, if it stays in one spot or moves around, when and how long it's hurt, if it comes and goes, and if it hurts with certain movements. You may be asked to rate your pain from 0 to 10. Share your usual pain level and your worst and best days. Use simple words to describe it, like dull, aching, burning or sharp.

What type of exercise is best for painful joints?

Low-impact activities like walking, swimming, biking, yoga and tai chi are best. Check with your care team before trying higher-impact activities. A little movement is better than nothing, and all movement counts — even everyday tasks. Include strength training, stretching, cardio and balance work.

Are there treatments I can try at home to soothe sore joints?

Use cold for new pain from injury, overuse or a flare. It reduces swelling and pain. Try a cold pack for 15 to 20 minutes and protect skin from the cold with a towel. Use heat to relax muscles and improve blood flow. Try a warm bath, shower or heating pad for 15 to 20 minutes. Over-the-counter topical gels and creams can ease pain, and stretching and light movement can ease stiffness.