

## About Osteoarthritis

Osteoarthritis (OA) is the most common form of arthritis. OA can affect any joint, but it occurs most often in the small joints of the fingers, knees, hips, lower back and neck. It is a chronic (long-term) disease for which there is no cure.

In healthy joints, a firm, rubbery material called cartilage covers the end of each bone. Cartilage provides a smooth, gliding surface for joint motion and acts as a cushion between the bones. In OA, the cartilage breaks down, causing pain, swelling and problems using the joint. As the cartilage breaks down, changes may occur in the underlying bone. The membrane lining the joint (the synovium) may also become inflamed.

## Signs and Symptoms of Osteoarthritis

Osteoarthritis symptoms tend to build over time rather than show up suddenly. Common symptoms include:

- Pain, aching or tenderness in and around a joint that comes and goes and worsens over time
- Stiffness that makes it difficult to move the joint
- Swelling around a joint
- Clicking or cracking sound when a joint moves

Joints affected by osteoarthritis usually hurt or feel stiff during or after use. Stiffness after not moving for a while is also common. For example, you may find it hard to use the joint in the morning, but after moving for a few minutes, it may feel better. Then, later in the day it may hurt after use.

## FAST FACTS

- **More than 30 million adults in the U.S. have OA.**
- **One in four adults will develop symptoms of hip OA by age 85.**
- **One in two adults will develop symptoms of knee OA during their lives.**
- **One in 12 people 60 or older have hand OA.**
- **More than 80 percent of people over age 55 show signs of OA on an X-ray.**

## Diagnosing Osteoarthritis

Doctors typically rely on a physical examination and medical history to diagnose osteoarthritis. X-rays can help confirm a diagnosis, rule out other causes of pain and assess joint damage. Blood tests or joint aspiration (a procedure in which fluid is drained from a joint and examined) may be used to help rule out other forms of arthritis.

## Treating Osteoarthritis

OA is managed with a combination of self-management, medication and nondrug therapies. Together

## For More Information

**OA Information**  
[arthritis.org/about-arthritis](https://www.arthritis.org/about-arthritis)

**Arthritis Foundation Helpline**  
**1-800-283-7800 | [helpline@arthritis.org](mailto:helpline@arthritis.org)**

with your doctor, you can determine the best approach for managing your OA.

Physical activity and weight management are two of the most important and beneficial ways to manage OA. Simple activities like taking regular walks can help reduce pain. It is recommended that everyone gets at least 150 minutes of moderate exercise each week. Physical activity, along with a balanced diet, can help you maintain a healthy weight.

Both prescription and over-the-counter medications may be used to reduce pain and decrease inflammation. These medications are available as pills, syrups, creams or injectable solutions. Your doctor can best advise which medications are best for you. (Learn more about medications for OA at [arthritis.org/drug-guide](http://arthritis.org/drug-guide).)

Nondrug therapies, such as physical therapy, occupational therapy or chiropractic care, can help you maintain strength and flexibility and help you use your joints properly and safely. Other complementary therapies include nutritional supplements, massage, acupuncture and mind-body techniques (e.g., biofeedback or cognitive behavioral therapy). Self-management techniques you can do at home include meditation and relaxation exercises, heat and cold therapy, balancing



### ! OA RISK FACTORS

**The following are risk factors associated with developing osteoarthritis:**

- **Previous joint injury or joint overuse**
- **Obesity – Extra weight adds additional stress on weight-bearing joints**
- **Age – The risk of developing OA increases with age**
- **Genetics – People with relatives with OA are more likely to develop it themselves**
- **Gender – Women, especially those over 50, are more likely to develop OA than men**

activity and rest and doing everyday tasks in ways that reduce stress on joints.

Rarely, joint surgery may be necessary to repair or replace severely damaged joints.

**FAQ**

**Can young people get OA?** Though osteoarthritis prevalence spikes around age 45 and is most common in people over age 65, more young people are developing OA. In some cases, the OA results from childhood sports injuries or obesity. Research also shows that people serving in the military may be more likely to develop OA.

**What's the best way to slow down disease progression?** OA cannot be reversed, but you can control its progression by maintaining a healthy weight, staying physically

active, avoiding joint injury and adjusting jobs that require repetitive movement or heavy loading of joints.

**How do you know it's time to have surgery?** If you have exhausted all treatment options and still experience continual pain that interferes with your daily life, then it may be time to consider joint surgery. Talk to your doctor about all available options. Over 7 million people in the U.S. are living successfully with knee and hip replacements.