



# Arthritis Answers

## About Arthritis

Nearly 60 million adults and hundreds of thousands of children and teens in the U.S. have some type of arthritis. So, chances are good that you or someone you know has arthritis.

The word “arthritis” comes from the Greek words for joint and inflammation. It is an umbrella term for more than 100 types of arthritis and related conditions.

Joint pain and stiffness — especially in the morning or after sitting still for a long time — are the most common signs of arthritis. But, depending on the type of arthritis, there are a number of possible symptoms, including fatigue, eye irritation, poor appetite, low-grade fever, rash or warm, tender joints that may look red or discolored. Symptoms can come on suddenly or slowly over time. If they last more than two weeks, it’s a good idea to check with your doctor.

## Arthritis Causes and Diagnosis

The exact cause isn’t known for many types of arthritis. Experts believe a mix of factors may be responsible, depending on the type. These may include your genes, environmental triggers like past injuries, an immune system that isn’t working correctly, or lifestyle factors like being overweight.

Diagnosing arthritis early and starting treatment right away can help slow the disease activity and prevent permanent damage to your joints or other organs, like your heart or eyes. Your primary doctor might be able to diagnose and treat your arthritis. But sometimes you might need to see a specialist, like a rheumatologist or orthopedist, who focuses on bones, joints, muscles and tissues that connect them, called the musculoskeletal system.

There is no single test for arthritis. To diagnose you, your doctor will:

- Examine your joints for swelling and tenderness.
- Ask about your personal and family medical history.
- Test your range of motion.
- Look for other signs of arthritis, like rashes, mouth sores, muscle weakness, eye problems or involvement of internal organs, such as the heart or lungs.
- Order X-rays or lab tests to rule out other causes.

## Types of Arthritis and Related Conditions

It’s important to know the type of arthritis you have so you can treat it properly. Here are some of the most common types of arthritis conditions:

- **Osteoarthritis (OA)** is the most common type of arthritis. Inflammation and other forces cause the cartilage (tissue that covers the ends of bones) to wear down and change shape, causing pain and stiffness and making it hard to use the joint. Repetitive motions, previous injuries, age and excess weight make it more likely that you’ll get OA.

## ⬆️ WARNING SIGNS OF ARTHRITIS

- Joint pain or stiffness
- Widespread muscle pain
- Joint swelling and/or tenderness
- Difficulty moving a joint
- Redness around the joint
- Skin symptoms like a scaly rash
- Blurry vision, or eye pain and/or sensitivity

## For More Information

Arthritis Foundation

[arthritis.org](https://arthritis.org)

About Arthritis

[arthritis.org/about-arthritis](https://arthritis.org/about-arthritis)

Arthritis Foundation Helpline:

800-283-7800

[arthritis.org/helpline](https://arthritis.org/helpline)

- **Rheumatoid arthritis (RA)** is an autoimmune disease, meaning your immune system mistakenly attacks healthy tissue. This can cause joint inflammation, cartilage breakdown and joint damage. It can also attack other healthy tissues, causing problems with the heart, lungs, eyes and other organs.
- **Psoriatic Arthritis (PsA)** is also an autoimmune disease. In addition to joint inflammation and pain, PsA may cause skin rashes, nail disease and swollen fingers or toes. It can also cause pain in the back and where tendons or ligaments connect to bones (called enthesitis).
- **Juvenile Arthritis (JA)** is a term used to describe the types of arthritis and related diseases that affect children and teens under 16. (Juvenile arthritis is not a medical term.) The most common type of JA is juvenile idiopathic arthritis (JIA). Children diagnosed with JIA may continue to have disease activity into adulthood.
- **Gout** occurs when uric acid builds up in the body. It forms needle-like crystals, especially in joints. This causes sharp pain and swelling, most commonly in the big toes, ankles and knees.
- **Axial spondyloarthritis (axSpA)** is a form of arthritis that causes pain and swelling mostly in the spine and the joints that connect the bottom of the spine to the pelvis. Other joints can be affected, too. If damage can be seen on X-rays, then it's called ankylosing spondylitis (AS). If damage can't be seen but there are other symptoms, then it's called nonradiographic axial spondylitis (nr-axSpA).
- **Fibromyalgia** is a related disease that many people with RA and other types of arthritis get. It affects the central nervous system and causes fatigue and long-lasting, widespread pain in the muscles.

## Treating Arthritis

Treating arthritis takes a number of different approaches. They may include:

- **Medication.** Over-the-counter and prescription medications are available as pills, creams, gels, injections or IV infusions administered at your doctor's office or the hospital.
- **Healthy lifestyle habits.** Regular physical activity and eating a healthy diet may help ease inflammation and pain. Both can help you maintain healthy weight, which may lessen the impact on your joints. An anti-inflammatory diet includes lots of fruits, vegetables, whole grains and healthy fats and reduces sugar and sweeteners, salt, red meats and processed foods. It is also important to quit smoking and try to get plenty of restful sleep.
- **Joint protection.** Adjust how you move so it causes less pain, use braces or splints when needed and other joint protection techniques to avoid straining them. Balancing activity with rest can also ease pain.
- **Surgery.** When other treatment options are not effective, joint surgery may become the best option.
- **Complementary therapies.** These should be in addition to medicines and therapies your doctor recommends. Complementary therapies can help manage pain and improve your emotional and mental health. They include certain supplements, massage, physical therapy, acupuncture, mind-body exercises like yoga and tai chi, biofeedback therapy, meditation and other relaxation techniques to reduce stress.

## FAQs

### Do I have to take medication?

Depending on your type of arthritis, you may need medication to ease pain and slow disease activity and to prevent permanent joint damage. Early treatment with strong medicines might be needed to get your disease under control and avoid medication long term. Practicing healthy lifestyle habits can also affect how much and how long you may need medication.

### Does arthritis ever go away?

For many people, arthritis is a lifelong condition once they develop it. If you have an autoimmune type of arthritis, like rheumatoid, psoriatic or juvenile arthritis, you may have periods of remission with little or no disease activity. But you have to follow your doctor's instructions to prevent flares, when the disease and its symptoms are more active. With osteoarthritis, symptoms may get much better or go away with a combination of medication, lifestyle changes like losing weight and staying active, or in some cases, joint replacement surgery.

### What are the best exercises for arthritis?

Low-impact activities like swimming, walking, yoga and bike riding are best for weight-bearing joints. Including knees, hips, back, ankles and feet. Swimming and yoga are good for upper-body joints, too. But if you have more joint pain — not sore muscles from exercise — two hours after exercise, you probably overdid it. Next time, cut back a bit, but don't stop exercising.