

About Arthritis

Nearly 60 million adults and 300,000 children in the U.S. have some type of arthritis, so chances are you or someone you know has the condition. The term “arthritis” comes from the Greek words for joint and inflammation. There are more than 100 types of arthritis and related conditions.

The hallmark symptom of arthritis is joint pain and/or stiffness, which is usually worse in the morning or after periods of inactivity. Other symptoms may include fatigue, eye problems, poor appetite, fever, rash and joints that are red or warm to the touch. Symptoms can develop suddenly or slowly, but if you have any of these signs for more than two weeks, it’s time to see your doctor.

Arthritis Causes and Diagnosis

For most types of arthritis, the cause is unknown. But scientists think that genes, environmental triggers, an immune system that doesn’t work properly and lifestyle factors, such as obesity and injury, are contributing factors.

Early diagnosis and treatment are key to slowing disease progression and/or preventing joint (or organ) damage. Your primary care doctor may diagnose and treat your arthritis. However, you may need to see a rheumatologist or orthopaedist, doctors that specialize in treating arthritis.

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

- Ask about your personal and family medical history.
- Examine your joints for swelling and tenderness.
- Test your range of motion.

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**

• Look for other signs of arthritis such as rashes, mouth sores, muscle weakness, eye problems or involvement of internal organs, such as the heart or lungs.

Your doctor may also order X-rays or lab tests to look for disease patterns or 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 and related conditions:

• **Osteoarthritis (OA)** is the most common type of arthritis. It is often called “wear and tear” arthritis because it is caused by the breakdown of cartilage (the tissue that

For More Information

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covers the ends of joints) over time. Risk factors include repetitive movement, age and excess weight.

- **Rheumatoid arthritis (RA)** is an autoimmune disease, which means the body's immune system mistakenly attacks healthy tissue. This can cause joint inflammation, cartilage erosion and joint damage.
- **Psoriatic Arthritis (PsA)** is also an autoimmune disease. In addition to joint inflammation, PsA may cause rashes or scaly skin, nail disease as well as pain in the back or tendons (areas where muscles attach to bones).
- **Juvenile Arthritis (JA)** is an umbrella term to describe the kinds of rheumatic diseases that affect teens and kids. The most common type of JA is juvenile idiopathic arthritis (JIA). You may continue to experience disease activity into adulthood.
- **Gout** occurs when uric acid builds up in the body, especially the joints. This causes pain and swelling, most commonly in the big toes, ankles and knees.
- **Fibromyalgia** involves chronic widespread pain in the muscles and fatigue.

Treating Arthritis

Arthritis treatment typically requires multiple approaches. These approaches may include:

- **Medication.** Over the counter and prescription medications are available as a pill, cream, gel, injection or IV infusion administered at your doctor's office or hospital.
 - **Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) therapies.** CAM therapies are usually combined with conventional treatments to manage pain and enhance emotional and mental health. These include supplements, touch therapies (e.g., massage, physical therapy), therapeutic exercise (e.g., yoga and tai chi), acupuncture, biofeedback therapy, meditation and relaxation techniques.
 - **Healthy lifestyle habits.** Regular exercise and eating an anti-inflammatory diet (rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains and healthy fats) may help ease inflammation and pain. Both can help you maintain a healthy weight, which may lessen the impact on your joints. Using joint protection techniques and balancing activity with rest can also ease pain.
 - **Surgery.** When other treatment options are not effective, joint surgery may be the best option.
- Finding the right treatment plan may take time. As your arthritis changes, your treatment may also need to change.

FAQ

Do I have to take medication? Depending on your type of arthritis, you may need medication for quick pain relief and to slow disease progression. Early aggressive treatment will help get your disease under control and may lessen the need for 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 most people, arthritis is a lifelong condition. If you have an autoimmune type of arthritis you may experience periods of remission (no visible signs of the disease). But you have to carefully follow

your doctor's instructions to prevent flares (periods of worsening disease and symptoms). With other types, you may eliminate symptoms with a combination of lifestyle changes, medication and, sometimes, surgery.

What are the best exercises for arthritis?

Low-impact activities like swimming, walking, yoga and bike riding are best for the joints. But if you have more pain (not just sore muscles from exercise) two hours after exercise, you probably did too much. Pace yourself, alternating periods of activity with rest. But don't stop exercising.