

Body Conditions: OSTEOARTHRITIS (OA)

Osteoarthritis is the breakdown of cartilage in the joints. This is followed by chronic inflammation of the joint lining. Healthy cartilage is a cushion between the bones in a joint. Osteoarthritis usually affects the hands, feet, spine, hips, and knees. People with osteoarthritis usually have joint pain and limited movement of the affected joint.



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Causes

The exact cause is unclear.

Risk Factors

Factors that may increase your chance of developing osteoarthritis include:

- Increasing age
- Excess body weight
- Family history of osteoarthritis
- Certain endocrine, metabolic, or neuropathic disorders, avascular necrosis
- Having an injury or surgery to the joint surface, especially the cartilage
- Having an occupation or doing physical activities that put stress on joints

Symptoms

Osteoarthritis may cause:

- Mild-to-severe pain in a joint, especially after overuse or long periods of inactivity, such as sitting for a long time
- Creaking or grating sound in the joint
- Swelling, stiffness, limited movement of the joint, especially in the morning
- Deformity of the joint

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Diagnosis

Your doctor will ask about your symptoms and medical history. A physical exam will be done. Tests may include:

- X-ray to see internal bony structures
- CT scan to look at the extent of the arthritis
- Arthrocentesis to rule out other causes of arthritis
- Blood tests to rule out other causes of arthritis

Treatment

The physical therapist's role is to help decrease your pain and swelling, increase your strength and range of motion, and develop a suitable and effective home exercise program that will reduce the overall symptoms of osteoarthritis. The treatment plan in physical therapy might consist of:

- Strengthening, endurance, and flexibility exercises
- Manual therapy
- Electrical stimulation (ESTIM)
- Heat or cold packs

Prevention

To help reduce your chance of developing osteoarthritis, take these steps:

- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Do regular, gentle exercise, such as walking, stretching, swimming, or yoga.
- Avoid repetitive motions and risky activities that may contribute to joint injury, especially after age 40.
- With advancing age, certain activities may have to be stopped or modified. It is important to continue to be active, so find an activity that suits you.