

Focus on:

Arthritis

REFERENCE



What is Arthritis?

Many people start to feel pain and stiffness in their bodies over time. Sometimes their hands or knees or shoulders get sore and are hard to move and may become swollen. These people may have arthritis. Arthritis may be caused by inflammation of the tissue lining the joints - places where two bones meet, such as your elbow or knee. Some signs of inflammation include:

- › Redness
- › Heat
- › Pain
- › Swelling

These are signs that something may be wrong.

Types of Arthritis

There are several types of arthritis. The two most common ones are Osteoarthritis and Rheumatoid arthritis.

Osteoarthritis is the most common form of arthritis. This condition usually comes with age and most often affects the fingers, knees and hips. Sometimes osteoarthritis follows an injury to a joint. For example, you might hurt your knee badly playing soccer, or fall or be injured in a car accident. Then, years after your knee has apparently healed, you might get arthritis in your knee joint.

Rheumatoid arthritis happens when the body's own defense system doesn't work properly. It affects joints and bones (often of the hands and feet), and may also affect internal organs and systems. You may feel sick or tired, and you may have a fever.

Another common type of arthritis, gout, is caused by crystals that build up in the joints. It usually affects the big toe, but many other joints may be affected.

Arthritis is seen with many other conditions. These include:

- › Lupus, in which the body's defense system can harm the joints, the heart, the skin, the kidneys, and other organs
- › An infection that gets into a joint and destroys the cushion between the bones



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Symptoms of Arthritis

Pain is the way your body tells you that something is wrong. Most types of arthritis cause pain in your joints and you might have trouble moving around. Some kinds of arthritis can affect different parts of your body, so along with pain in your joints, you may experience the following:

- › Fever
- › Loss of weight
- › Trouble breathing
- › A rash or itch
- › Stiffness or pain when you move

These symptoms may also be signs of other illnesses, though. Consult with your physician to determine if you have arthritis or could be at risk for it.

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- › Exercise. Moving all of your joints will help you. The physician or a nurse can show you how to move more easily. Going for a walk every day will help, too.
- › Take your medicines when and how you are supposed to. They can help reduce pain and stiffness.
- › See your doctor regularly.

For more information on arthritis, log onto www.nih.gov.

TIPS



Treatment

After your physician determines what kind of arthritis you have, he or she will talk with you about the best way to treat it. In most cases, your physician will give you a prescription for medicine that will help with the pain, stiffness and inflammation.

Sometimes you might still have pain after using your medicine. Here are some things to try at home or work:

- › Take a warm shower, especially in the morning
- › Do some gentle stretching exercises
- › Use an ice pack on the sore area
- › Rest the sore joint

If you still hurt after using your medicine correctly and doing one or more of these things, call your physician. Another kind of medicine might work better for you. Some people can also benefit from surgery, such as joint replacement.

You Can Feel Better!

Arthritis can damage your joints, internal organs, and skin. There are things you can do to keep the damage from getting worse and they might also make you feel better:

- › Try to keep your weight down. Too much weight can make your knees and hips hurt.

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