Arthritis Advice

"Arthritis" is not just a word doctors use when they talk about painful, stiff joints. In fact, there are many kinds of arthritis, each with different symptoms and treatments. Most types of arthritis are chronic. That means they can go on for a long period of time.

Arthritis can attack joints and muscles of any part of the body. Some forms of arthritis cause changes you can see and feel—swelling, warmth, and redness in your joints. Other types cause less noticeable changes that you can feel only—pain, stiffness, and tenderness.

Arthritis is one of the most common diseases in this country. Millions of adults and half of all people age 65 and older are troubled by this disease. Older people most often have osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, or gout.

Common Kinds of Arthritis

Osteoarthritis (OA) is the most common type of arthritis in older people. OA is the wear and tear arthritis. In OA, joints become rough and stiff as cartilage and bone wear away, leaving bones that rub against each other. You are most likely to have OA in the joints of your fingers, neck, lower back, or the large weight-bearing joints of your body, such as knees and hips.

OA symptoms can range from stiffness and mild pain to severe joint pain that prevents you from doing everyday activities. These deposits were in the lining of the blood vessels, causing inflammation. Inflammation causes pain, swelling, and stiffness that last for hours. This can often happen in many different joints at the same time. It can also cause problems moving joints and sometimes disfigure your hands, back, knees, or hips if affected.

Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA) is an autoimmune disease. In RA, that means your body attacks the lining of a joint just as it would if it were trying to protect you from injury or disease. For example, if you had a splinter in your finger, the finger would become inflamed—painful, red, and swollen. RA leads to inflammation in your joints.

Gout is one of the most painful forms of arthritis. A gout attack can begin when crystals of uric acid form in the connective tissue and/or joint spaces. This can cause sudden, severe pain. Gout may also make gout worse. In older people, some blood pressure medicines can also increase your chance of a gout attack.

Warning Signs

You might have some form of arthritis if you have:

✦ Lasting joint pain, joint swelling, joint stiffness, or tenderness when you touch a joint.
✦ Problems using or moving a joint normally, or warmth and redness in a joint.

If any one of these symptoms lasts longer than 2 weeks, see your regular doctor or a rheumatologist. If you have a fever, feel physically ill, suddenly lose the use of one or two toes, swelling makes it hard to pull tightly around the joint and make the joint red or people tend your doctor might suggest blood tests and x-rays. He or she might also ask you to take fluid from your joint while you are having an attack.

Treatings Arthritis

Each kind of arthritis is handled a little differently, but there are some common treatment choices. Rest, exercise, a healthy, well-balanced diet, and learning the right way to use and protect your joints are key to living with any kind of arthritis. The right shoes and a cane can help with pain in your feet and hips, knees, and feet when walking. You can also use a walker, cane, or crutch to help you get along. You might also try to turn the door knobs in your house more easily.

In addition, there are also medications that can help with the pain and swelling. Acetaminophen can safely ease pain and swelling. Some NSAIDs (nonsteroidal anti-inflam-matory drugs), like ibuprofen and naproxen should be used without a pre-scription. Other NSAIDs must be prescribed by a doctor. But in 2000, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) warned people about using NSAIDs, both those sold with and without a prescription. You should read the warnings on the package or insert that comes with the drug. Take a close look at what and how you should use acetaminophen or any other medications in arthritis pain. You can also check with the FDA for more information about diabetes.

Some treatments are special for each common type of arthritis. Some other types of arthritis include:

Medicines can help you control OA pain. Rest and exercise will make it easier for you to keep joint pain in check. Keeping your weight down is a good idea. Pain from OA on your knee is very bad, your doctor might give you shots in the joint. This can help you to

National Institute on Aging

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Arthritis can attack joints and other parts of the body. Some forms of arthritis cause changes you can see and feel—swelling, warmth, and redness in your joints. Some others cause just the pain and swelling last only a short time, but are very bad. Other types cause less troublesome symptoms, but still slowly damage your joints.

Common Kinds of Arthritis

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Osteoarthritis (OA) is the most common type of arthritis in older people. In fact, the joints in the lower legs often become thickened and feel warm. Cartilage, the tissue that pads bones, can also be worn out by age. At OA’s worst, the ends of the bones lose a coating that helps them slide against each other. People may be less likely to notice OA in the neck, lower back, or the large weight-bearing joints of the body, such as knees and hips.

OA symptoms can range from stiffness and pain when you first get up in the morning and goes with activities like walking, bending, or stooping to severe joint pain that keeps on even when you rest or try to sleep. Sometimes OA causes a joint to give way if you aren’t careful, but you won’t have to worry about that, like stilt walking in a wading pool. If you have OA in your knee, the joint would become inflamed—painful, red, warm, and swollen. It can be painful to walk, bend, or stand. OA can cause heart disease, stroke, and other medical problems. OA is one of the most common diseases in this country.

Other forms of arthritis include psoriatic arthritis (in people with the skin condition psoriasis), anklyosing spondylitis (which mostly affects the spine), and Reiter’s disease (that occurs as a reaction to an infection in another part of the body). Arthritis in the temporomandibular joint (where the jaw joins the skull).

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You might have some form of arthritis if you have:

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✦ Joint swelling,
✦ Joint stiffness,
✦ Tenderness or pain when touching a joint,
✦ Problems using or moving a joint,
✦ Warmth and redness in a joint.

If any one of these symptoms lasts longer than 2 weeks, see your regular doctor or a rheumatologist. If you have a fever, feel physically ill, suddenly notice joint pain, or have problems using your joint, see your regular doctor. Your health care provider will ask questions about your symptoms and do a physical exam. If she or he may take x rays or do lab tests before suggesting a treatment plan.

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Osteoarthritis (OA) is the most common type of arthritis in older people. OA affects the joints in the fingers, wrists, shoulders, elbows, hips, knees, ankles, feet, and neck. As people age, the cartilage that cushions these joints begins to become ragged and wears away. Cartilage is the tissue that pads bones in a joint. At OA’s worst, the cartilage is so thin that you can see the bone underneath. OA also can attack joints in the hands, fingers, neck, lower back, or the large weight-bearing joints of your body, such as knees and hips.

OA symptoms can range from sudden and severe swelling to an aching pain when you move your fingers and wrists or go out for a walk. OA can also cause aching in the joints that wear out, like knees and hips. OA symptoms that last for several months are a good reason to see your doctor. OA can also cause problems moving joints and sometimes disable you if your back, hips, or knees are affected.

Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA) is an autoimmune disease. In RA, that means your body attacks the lining of a joint just as it would if it were trying to protect you from infection or injury. For example, if you had a splinter in your finger, the finger would become inflamed—painful, red, and swollen. RA leads to inflammation in your joints. This inflammation causes pain, swelling, and stiffness that lasts for hours. This can often happen in many different joints at the same time. You might not even be able to move your joint. People with RA often don’t feel well. They may be tired or have a fever. People with RA may feel more tired or have fever and other signs of infection. Your doctor might suggest blood tests and x-rays. He or she might also suggest that you take the joint pain away if you are having an attack.

If you have one of these symptoms last longer than 2 weeks, see your regular doctor or a rheumatologist. If you have a fever, feel physically ill, suddenly have a swollen joint, or have problems using your joint, see your doctor right away. Your health care provider will ask questions about your symptoms and do a physical exam. He or she may take x rays or do lab tests before suggesting a treatment plan.

Treating Arthritis

Each kind of arthritis is handled a little differently, but there are some common treatment choices. Rest, exercise, eating a healthy, well-balanced diet, and learning the right way to move and protect your joints is key to living with any kind of arthritis. The right clothes and a cane can help with pain in your feet, knees, and hips, too. Walking slowly and using a cane can also help you open jars and bottles or to turn the doorknob in your house. People with RA can also help protect your joints.

Some treatments are special for each common type of arthritis. For example, Medicine can help control OA pain. Rest and exercise will make it easier for you to move your joint. Keeping your weight down is a good idea. If pain from OA in your knee is very bad, your doctor might give you shots in the joint. This can help you to

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In addition, there are also medicines that can help with the pain and swelling. Acetaminophen can safely ease arthritis pain. Some NSAIDs (nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs), like ibuprofen and naproxen, also work. But they may cause side effects. Other NSAIDs can be taken only under a prescription. Some NSAIDs can lead to bleeding problems, but do not take a blood thinner without a prescription. Other NSAIDs may not be safe for children or in pregnancy. Read the package insert or consult a doctor about if and how you should use acetaminophen or other NSAIDs in the arthritis pain.

You can also check with the FDA for more information about these drugs.

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Osteoarthritis (OA) is the most common type of arthritis in older people. OA is a degenerative disease that causes pain, stiffness, and loss of movement in the joints. OA affects many parts of the body—joints in the hands, spine, hips, and knees, for example. It can cause the following symptoms: tenderness and swelling of the joint, loss of range of motion, pain after exercise, and noticeable joint enlargement.

OA is not contagious. It is not an autoimmune disease. It is not caused by poor diet. It is not caused by lack of exercise.

OA can be caused by a number of factors:
- Aging: The cartilage in the joint wears away with age.
- Injury: A joint can be injured by an accident or by overuse of the joint.
- Joint replacement surgery: A joint replacement surgery can cause OA.
- Genetics: Some people are more likely to develop OA than others.

OA symptoms can range from stiffness and pain to more serious joint problems. OA can cause:
- Joint pain and swelling.
- Joint stiffness.
- Tenderness or pain when touching a joint.
- Problems using or moving a joint normally.
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OA pain is often mild or moderate. However, OA can be severe in some cases. OA pain can be made worse by:
- Joint inflammation.
- Joint infection.
- Joint surgery.
- Joint injury.
- Joint replacement surgery.
- Joint pain from another illness.
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may be unproven? How can you tell that a remedy is safe? The National Institute on Aging and the National Library of Medicine. This simple-to-use website features popular health topics for older adults. It has large type and a ‘talking’ function that reads the text out loud.

To get the NIA’s exercise book or video or for more information on health and aging, call or write:

To order publications (in English or Spanish) or sign up for regular email alerts, visit: www.nia.nih.gov

The National Institute on Aging website is

www.nia.nih.gov

www.nihseniorhealth.gov

www.niams.nih.gov

www.rheumatology.org

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As weight training, will keep or add to muscle strength. Strong muscles support and protect your joints.

Recent studies suggest that Chinese acupuncture may ease OA pain for some people. Others try dietary supplements, such as glucosamine and chondroitin. Research now shows that these dietary supplements may help lessen your OA pain. Scientists are studying alternative treatments, such as these two supplements, to find out how they work. You may try them if you keep the joint changes caused by OA from getting worse. More information is needed before anyone can be sure.

Talk to Your Doctor

Most importantly, do not take for granted that your pain and arthritis are just part of growing older normally. You and your doctor must see where you are and go from there.

Other Things to Do

Along with exercise and weight control, there are other ways to ease pain around joints. You might find comfort by applying heat or cold, soaking in a warm bath, or swimming in a heated pool. Three types of exercise are best if you have arthritis:

- Range-of-motion exercises, like dancing, exercise stills keep you flexible, and help you keep your joints from becoming stiff.
- Strengthening exercises, such as weight training, will keep or add to muscle strength. Strong muscles support and protect your joints.
- Aerobic or endurance exercises, like bicycling, make your heart and arteries healthier, help prevent weight gain, and improve the overall working of your body. Aerobic exercise also may prevent swelling in some joints.

Exercise Can Help

Along with taking the right medicine and properly resting your joints, exercise is a good way to stay fit, keep your joints and muscle healthy, and control arthritis symptoms. Daily exercise, such as walking, or swimming, can do a lot to lessen pain, and makes muscles around the joints stronger.

Unproven Remedies

Many people with arthritis try remedies that have not been tested or studied well. Most of these, such as snake venoms, are harmful. Others, such as copper bracelets, are not known to improve arthritis. However, how safe it is that a remedy may be unproven?

- The remedy claims that a treatment, like a lotion or cream, works for all types of arthritis and other diseases, or that it works best if you have arthritis:
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move your knee and get about 4 inches from your foot. If you have surgery to repair or replace damaged joints.

Rheumatoid Arthritis. With treatment, the pain and swelling from RA will get better, and you should feel better. In addition to pain and anti-inflammatory medication, your doctor might suggest antimalarial drugs, called DMARDs (disease-modifying antirheumatic drugs). These can slow damage from the disease. Medicines like prednisone, known as corticosteroids, can ease swelling while you take DMARDs to take effect. Another type of drug, biologic response modifiers, blocks the damage done by the immune system. They sometimes help people with mild-to-moderate RA when other treatments have not worked.

Goal. If you have had an attack of gout, talk to your doctor to learn why you had the attack and how to prevent future attacks. The most common treatment is an acute attack of gout using NSAIDs or corticosteroids like prednisone. This relieves swelling, so you may start to feel better within a few hours after your dose. The attack usually goes away fully within a few days. If you have had several attacks, your doctor may suggest the medicines to prevent future ones.

Exercises, such as walking or swimming, help keep joints from getting swollen.

Avoid or reduce exercises, like bicycle riding, make your heart and arteries healthier, help prevent weight gain, and improve the overall working of your body. Active exercise also helps with swelling in some joints.

The National Institute on Aging (NIA) has a 48-minute companion video. See the last panel of this Age Page for more information. Before beginning any exercise program, talk with your doctor or health care worker.

Three types of exercises are best if you have arthritis:

1. Range-of-motion exercises, like dancing, will keep you flexible, and help you keep your joints from getting swollen.

2. Strengthening exercises, such as weight training, will keep you fit and add to muscle strength. Strong muscles support and protect your joints.

3. Aerobic or endurance exercises, like bicycle riding, make your heart and arteries healthier, help prevent weight gain, and improve the overall working of your body. Active exercise also helps with swelling in some joints.

Artificial Joints. When gout becomes disabling or when other treatments fail, some people choose to have surgery to repair or replace joints with artificial, man-made ones. In the most common operations, doctors replace hips and knees.

Unproven Remedies. Many people with arthritis try remedies that have not been tested or proved to be helpful. Some of these, such as snake venom, are harmful. Others, such as copper bracelets, are not. But it is not harmful.

Here are other resources about arthritis:

- Visit NIHSeniorHealth.gov, the National Institute on Aging (NIA) website, for more information on health and aging. To order publications (in English or Spanish) or sign up for regular email alerts, visit: www.nia.nih.gov.
- Or sign up for regular email alerts, visit: www.nia.nih.gov.
- For more information on health and aging, call or write: NIA Information Center, P.O. Box 8057 Gaithersburg, MD 20898-8057, 1-800-222-2225 (toll-free), 1-800-222-4225 (TTY toll-free).
- For information on joint pain, call or write: NIA Information Center, P.O. Box 8057 Gaithersburg, MD 20898-8057, 1-800-222-2225 (toll-free), 1-800-222-4225 (TTY toll-free).
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Aerobic or endurance exercises, like bicycling, make your heart and arteries healthier, help prevent weight gain, and improve the overall working of your body. Aerobic exercise also helps keep or add to muscle strength.

Areas for Further Research
Recent studies suggest that Chinese acupuncture may ease OA pain for some people. Other dietary supplements, such as glucosamine and chondroitin. Research now shows that these dietary supplements may help lessen your OA pain. Scientists are studying alternative treatments, such as these two supplements, to find out how they work. It is too early to tell the joint effects caused by arthritis from getting worse. More information is needed before anyone can be sure.

Back to Your Doctor
Most importantly, do not take for granted that your pain and arthritis are just part of growing older normally. You and your doctor should not accept pain and joint damage as inevitable. Together, you and your doctor can work to safely lessen the pain and stiffness that might be troubling you and to prevent more serious damage to your joints.

Other Things to Do
Along with exercise and weight control, there are other ways to lessen OA pain. You might find comfort by applying heat or cold, soaking in a warm bath, or swimming in a heated pool.

The National Institute on Aging (NIA) has a free 80-page book about how to start and stick with a safe exercise program. The Institute also has a 48-minute companion video. See the last panel of this Age Page for more information. Before beginning any exercise program, talk with your doctor or health care worker.

To get the NIA’s exercise book or other resources about arthritis, visit: www.nia.nih.gov (or sign up for regular email alerts, visit: www.niapublications.org). The National Institute on Aging website is www.nia.nih.gov.

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