

What is it?



Osteoarthritis (OA) is the most common type of arthritis. It is caused by a wearing away of the cartilage covering the ends of the bone. This can result in the bones rubbing against each other, causing pain, warmth, and swelling. Osteoarthritis is more common as we get older and usually starts in our 50s or 60s. It is also more common in joints that have been injured.

The body reacts to the damage caused by osteoarthritis by growing new bone. This part of the body's healing process doesn't work well. It can result in the formation of bumps or "nodes" of new bone growth around the joint. This is most common in joints of the hands. The new bone growth can cause further joint stiffness and pain.



OA is caused by wear and tear on your joints.

Medications can make the joint work better but they can't reverse damage once it's done.

Think of it like this. The wearing down of the cartilage in your joints is like the wear and tear on a car tire. Once a tire has gone bald, the rubber can't be replaced. You can always put more air in the tire to optimize its functioning. But you can't put new rubber on a tire. The same is true with OA. Once the cartilage in a joint is worn away, the damage can't be reversed. Medications can help make the joint work as best as possible, but they can't repair the cartilage.

What is it going to do to me?



OA usually starts slowly and gets worse with time. The most common symptoms are joint pain and stiffness. Joints that are commonly affected by OA include the knees, hips, fingers, thumb, big toe, neck, and low back. When it affects the back it is also known as "degenerative disc disease."

Joints can feel stiff after a period of rest or after waking up in the morning. Morning stiffness usually lasts only 20 to 30 minutes, until the joints get "worked out." OA can also cause swelling of the joints. This can reduce a joint's flexibility, and can cause a loss of strength.

Typically pain is worse after the joint is used and gets better with rest. When OA is severe, the pain can continue throughout the day, even after periods of rest. In the most severe cases of OA the joints become so badly damaged that they lose their ability to function. When that happens, surgery may be necessary to restore a person's mobility and quality of life.

Visit RheumInfo.com



RheumInfo.com is a free educational website where you can learn more about OA and treatments for the disease. The website is operated by Dr. Andy Thompson, a rheumatologist.

What can I do about it?



People with OA can lead active and productive lives with the right kinds of treatment. Once the damage of OA is done it cannot be reversed with medicine. That's why the goal of treatment is to keep the joints as healthy as possible for as long as possible.

There are many treatment options available. A mixed approach is common. This can involve any or all of the following:

- 1. Exercise and stretching – a trained arthritis therapist can design a program to help improve the pain and stiffness in your joints.**
- 2. Joint protection – a trained arthritis therapist can provide education about joint protection to prevent further damage.**
- 3. Medications – to help control pain and improve function and mobility.**
- 4. Weight loss – even a modest amount (10 pounds) can reduce the load on your weight-bearing joints.**

Make sure you do everything you can to reduce any further damage to your joints. Here are some recommendations on what you should do:

- **Learn as much as you can about the disease**
- **Attend your family doctor and/or rheumatologist appointments regularly**
- **Learn about the different medications used to treat OA**
- **Learn how to protect your joints and use them properly**
- **Learn your activity limitations**
- **Identify activities that flare your joint pain and avoid them as much as possible**
- **Achieve and maintain a healthy weight**