

Osteoarthritis



What Is Osteoarthritis?

Osteoarthritis is a form of arthritis that causes cartilage in your joints to break down. Cartilage is the flexible tissue between bones at the joints. When you have osteoarthritis, it can become hard to move and do daily activities like walking, cooking, or writing. Osteoarthritis usually develops slowly and affects the hands, knees, hips, or spine. Risk factors include:

- Getting older.
- Being a woman.
- Bone deformities from birth.
- Injuries to the joints, such as from playing sports or from an accident.
- Being overweight, which puts added stress on your joints.
- Working in a job where you use the same joints over and over.
- Having certain diseases, like diabetes, underactive thyroid, or gout.



What Are the Warning Signs of Osteoarthritis?

- Joint pain, which is usually worse when active and gets better with rest
- Stiffness in the joints, especially after sitting for a long time or after getting out of bed in the morning
- Joint swelling
- Having a crunching feeling or feeling bone rubbing on bone when you move



How Is Osteoarthritis Diagnosed?

- Your doctor will ask about your symptoms, any other medical problems you have, and medicines you are taking. Your doctor will also ask if anyone in your family has had osteoarthritis.
- Your doctor will look at your joints, particularly those that hurt. You may also be asked to show your doctor how you walk, bend, and use your joints in other everyday ways.
- X-rays may be ordered to look for cartilage loss and joint damage. Blood tests may be used to help with diagnosis.
- You may have a test that uses a needle to collect a small sample of fluid from your joint so that it can be tested.



How Is Osteoarthritis Treated?

- Your doctor may prescribe medicine to help with pain.
- Physical therapy may be prescribed to help strengthen muscles around the joints and reduce pain and stiffness.
- If you are overweight, losing weight may help with osteoarthritis. Ask your doctor for help.
- Some people may need canes or braces to make it easier to get around.
- Your doctor may suggest steroid shots in the joint to help with pain.
- In some cases, people may need surgery to straighten bones or to replace joints.

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Questions for My Doctor

- Is it safe to exercise?
- What is the best treatment for osteoarthritis?
- Which medicines are best to treat my pain?
- Are there any side effects from the pain medicines?
- Will shots into my joints help?
- Will I need surgery on my joints?
- Is there anything I can do to slow the disease once I have it?
- Could alternative therapies like acupuncture help?



Bottom Line

- Osteoarthritis is a disease that causes the cartilage in your joints to break down.
- If you have osteoarthritis, it can be hard to do regular activities.
- Symptoms include joint pain, stiffness, and swelling.
- Your doctor will diagnose osteoarthritis by asking about your symptoms, examining your joints, and ordering X-rays and other tests to learn more about your condition.
- Treatment may include physical therapy, aids to make it easier to get around, pain relievers, and, in some cases, surgery.

For More Information

- **Medline Plus:** <https://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/osteoarthritis.html>
- **Arthritis Foundation:** www.arthritis.org/about-arthritis/types/osteoarthritis/
- **National Institutes of Health:** www.niams.nih.gov/Health_Info/Osteoarthritis/

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