

FAST FACTS: Non-inflammatory Joint Pain

Causes

Joint pain is associated with either a trauma to or disease of the joints and is extremely common in older adults. If there has not been a traumatic injury, such as a fall, the focus of joint pain is on an inflammatory joint disease (such as rheumatoid arthritis or Gout), or non-inflammatory osteoarthritis (OA) (also known as degenerative joint disease (DJD)). Both OA and DJD have a slow onset and become a chronic condition. Both may respond to pain medications and physical therapy and are reviewed in this Fast Fact. Gout and rheumatoid arthritis require management of the underlying condition with medications and is covered elsewhere.



Osteoarthritis (OA) / Degenerative Joint Disease (DJD)

- Common sites are knees, fingers, ankles, spine, hips, feet, shoulder.
- Affects multiple sites and is caused by wear and tear on the joint.
- Signs/symptoms: joint stiffness is most common in morning, pain typical after exercise or pressure on joint, rest may not relieve pain in the affected joint.

Traumatic Injury

- Dislocation or ligament/tendon injury; sudden onset of pain/swelling after a trauma.
- Immobilize the injury site and call your healthcare provider, ice may help.

Possible Intervention(s)

- OA/DJD
 - Try early morning range of motion or low-impact exercise (such as hydrotherapy).
 - If pain is in response to exercise, rest the joint; ice or heat may also help.
 - Other nondrug interventions and medication are often needed to relieve the pain (see [Low-Risk Pain Treatments](#)).

Additional Interventions

- Instruct on how to use a [Pain Diary](#) to note important information useful to the healthcare provider
- Attempt the non-pharmacological treatments (such as those outlined on the page [Low-Risk Pain Treatments](#)) and document their impact on pain and record in the Pain Diary.

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References

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). December 2, 2021. *Joint Pain and Arthritis*. <https://www.cdc.gov/arthritis/pain/index.htm>.

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Song, J. A., & Oh, J. W. (2022). Effects of Aquatic Exercises for Patients with Osteoarthritis: Systematic Review with Meta-Analysis. *Healthcare (Basel, Switzerland)*, 10(3), 560. <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare10030560>

WebMD. June 15, 2021. *Joint Pain*. <https://www.webmd.com/pain-management/guide/joint-pain>.