

FAST FACTS: Osteoarthritis

Osteoarthritis (OA), also called degenerative joint disease, is the most common type of arthritis. This type of arthritis is associated with the breakdown of a joint's cartilage, which is the firm, rubbery material that acts as a cushion for the ends of bones in normal joints. Osteoarthritis can impact any joint, but the most common joints affected are the hands, knees, hips, and spine. OA is the most common type of arthritis in middle and older aged individuals with women affected more often than men. OA is a progressive disease that gets worse overtime and can result in chronic pain. The joint pain and stiffness seen with OA can become severe enough to impact your loved one's daily activities.

✓ Symptoms

- Joint aching/soreness, especially with movement
- Stiffness upon awakening or with inactivity
- Tenderness with pressure on or near the joint
- Loss of flexibility or range of motion
- Grating, popping, or crackling sounds in joints
- Bony enlargements or bone spurs at joint
- Swelling of tissue around the joint

✓ Risk Factors

- Obesity can impact OA in knees, hips, and back.
- Joint injury due to sports, work-related activities, or accidents may increase risk of developing OA.
- Heredity- some individuals inherit that cause defective cartilage.
- Overuse of joint from work or sports activity
- Age is a factor, but research has shown that OA is not inevitable for all older adults.
- Gender- women are more likely to develop OA.
- Other diseases- such as diabetes and hemochromatosis (too much iron in the body).

✓ Common Treatment

The focus of OA treatment is on decreasing pain and improving movement.

- Over the counter (OTC) pain relievers and/or anti-inflammatory drugs, such as acetaminophen, aspirin, ibuprofen, or naproxen.
- Topical treatments to relieve pain or inflammation, such as rubs, creams, or sprays.
- Physical activity- exercise can improve joint movement (such as swimming or walking on flat surface).
- Losing weight can reduce stress on weight bearing joints.
- Heat or cold- hot shower or bath or heating pad or cold compress to area.
- Steroid injections- injection directly into the painful joint.
- Opioids- stronger pain medications prescribed by healthcare provider for severe pain when other treatments are not working.
- Surgery- if all other treatment options fail, some individuals may require surgery to relieve chronic pain related to damaged joints.



✓ **What Else You Should Do**

- Write down and share information about your loved one's pain prior to and following treatment to share with their primary healthcare team.
- Use a [Pain Diary](#) regularly to note important information useful to your loved one's healthcare providers.
- Encourage your loved one to try a non-drug treatment and document the impact on their pain in their Pain Diary.

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References

Mayo Clinic (2021). *Osteoarthritis*. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/osteoarthritis/symptoms-causes/syc-20351925>.

National Institute of Health: National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases (NIAMS). (2019). *Osteoarthritis*. <https://www.niams.nih.gov/health-topics/osteoarthritis>.