

## What is **osteoarthritis**?

**Osteoarthritis (OA) is the most common form of arthritis and can affect any joint. It often occurs in joints such as hips, knees, hands, feet, and spine.**

OA changes in the joint include the joint cartilage. Cartilage is the 'shock absorber' and protective lining of the joint.

With OA, inflammation affects the cartilage which results in thinning, roughening, or breaking down of the cartilage. With cartilage breakdown, there can also be other bone and joint changes that may add to discomfort, pain, stiffness, and swelling.

OA usually develops slowly with only small changes developing over many years.

OA can be mild or severe, affect one joint, or it can be more widespread affecting more joints.



### What are the symptoms?

Symptoms may include some or all of the following and are relieved by rest.

- Joint stiffness in the morning or after exercise, subsiding within 30 minutes
- Pain or swelling in or near joint
- Muscle weakness
- Creaking or cracking sensation with joint movement

### How is OA diagnosed?

There are no blood tests for OA. It is diagnosed by your doctor taking your medical history (asking you questions about your pain and your joints). They will then do a physical examination of affected joints. Your doctor might order an X-ray if your symptoms are severe enough to be considered for joint replacement. X rays and other scans are not needed for diagnosis.

### How can I help myself?

Lifestyle is an important part of managing symptoms, improving well-being, and reducing flares. This includes healthy nutrition and regular exercise.

- **Regular exercise** helps maintain the range of movement of the affected joint, and improves muscle strength to support the joint. Try low-impact exercises like swimming, cycling, rowing, and walking.
- Maintain a **healthy weight** to reduce pressure on the affected joints.
- **Protect your joints** by using assistive tools and devices that reduce the load on your joints, pacing exercise and activities, and resting in between activities.



## Who gets OA?

- OA is more common as we age, in women, and if we are carrying extra weight.
- It can run in families.
- People who have joint injury or infection, or do hard, repetitive physical activity can develop OA.



## Medical management

This is generally through your GP (General Practitioner). Paracetamol is the first medication used to treat pain. If you don't tolerate paracetamol then discuss the pain medication that is appropriate for you with your doctor. Often what your doctor prescribes can be the same as some medications you can buy without a prescription. Never double up on the dose or type of medication you are taking. If in doubt, ask your pharmacist. Physiotherapy, occupational therapy, braces, and splints might be recommended too.

### Key points



The best chance to slow down the progression of OA is to be diagnosed as soon as possible and start treatment.



Exercise and maintaining a healthy weight are the first steps to take to slow the progression.



Getting enough sleep and managing your stress have also been shown to reduce your pain level.



If you think you might have OA, we suggest you talk to your health care provider today.

**Learn more  
and find support**



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