

What Is Osteoarthritis? (OA)



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

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

With OA, the cartilage can be affected by inflammation which results in thinning, roughening, or breaking down of the cartilage, leaving the ends of bones unprotected.

With cartilage breakdown there can also be other bone and joint changes which may add to discomfort, pain, stiffness and swelling.

OA can develop slowly with only small changes developing over many years or sometimes can be more widespread and severe.

Who Gets Osteoarthritis?

- OA is more common in women, as we age, 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



What Are The Symptoms?

- Stiffness of joints
- Pain in or near joint
- Swelling in or near joint
- Muscle weakness
- Creaking or cracking sensation with joint movement



How Is It Diagnosed?

- Medical history
- Physical examination
- There are no blood tests for OA
- X-ray / MRI may be done to check disease progression but not always needed for diagnosis



Medical Management:

- Is generally through your GP and includes:
 - Pain medications: it is important not to self-medicate. Discuss the pain medication that is appropriate for you with your Doctor
 - Rub-on creams and gels may also be helpful

How Can I Help Myself?

Lifestyle is an important part of managing symptoms, improving wellbeing and reducing flares:

- Healthy nutrition and regular exercise
- Joint protection
- Relaxation/stress/sleep management
- Use of heat/cold compresses
- Complementary therapies



For more indepth information

Arthritis IQ

Do an online course about OA that will help enable the best care and give increased independence for people with OA. Visit [arthritis.org.nz/arthritis-iq-courses/](https://www.arthritis.org.nz/arthritis-iq-courses/) for more details.

Email: info@arthritis.org.nz, Phone: 0800 663 463



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