

Osteoarthritis

Staff Information Leaflet

Healthcare at its very best - with a personal touch

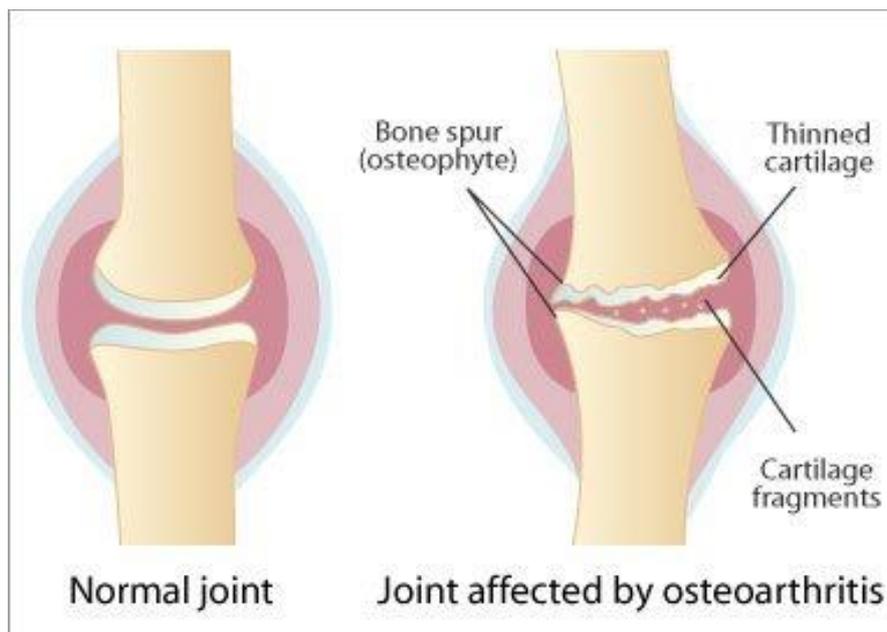
This leaflet is designed to give you an understanding of osteoarthritis, the treatment that may be beneficial and some advice on what you can do to help yourself. If your symptoms persist you should seek advice from your GP or Occupational health service.

Introduction

Osteoarthritis is a condition that affects the joints. Joints are formed where one bone meets another bone. A smooth substance called cartilage, lines the surfaces where the bones meet. The cartilage acts as a shock absorber, reducing friction between the bones, allowing the joint to move freely.

If the cartilage becomes roughened through natural aging or injury, the joint can become painful. The body then tries to repair the joint by producing more bone.

This process can lead to the joint looking thickened or 'knobbly'. The acute process is associated with pain, swelling and stiffness of the joint to varying degrees.



A common belief is that arthritis inevitably gets worse with age leading to increased pain and problems. This is not always the case. Sometimes the changes that occur inside the joint do not produce significant pain.

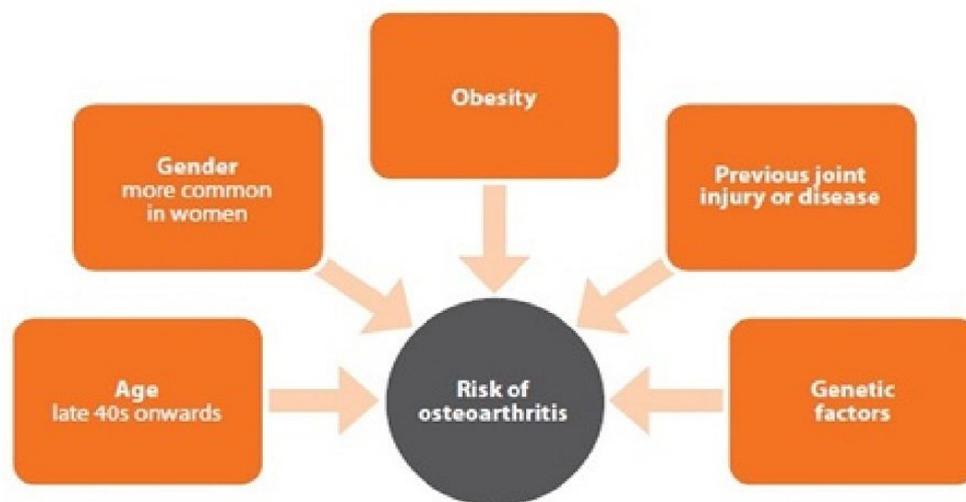
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Which joints are most commonly affected?

Commonly affected joints include:

- Knees
- Hips
- Neck and back
- Base of big toe
- Joints of the hands and thumb

Risk factors for developing Osteoarthritis



Symptoms

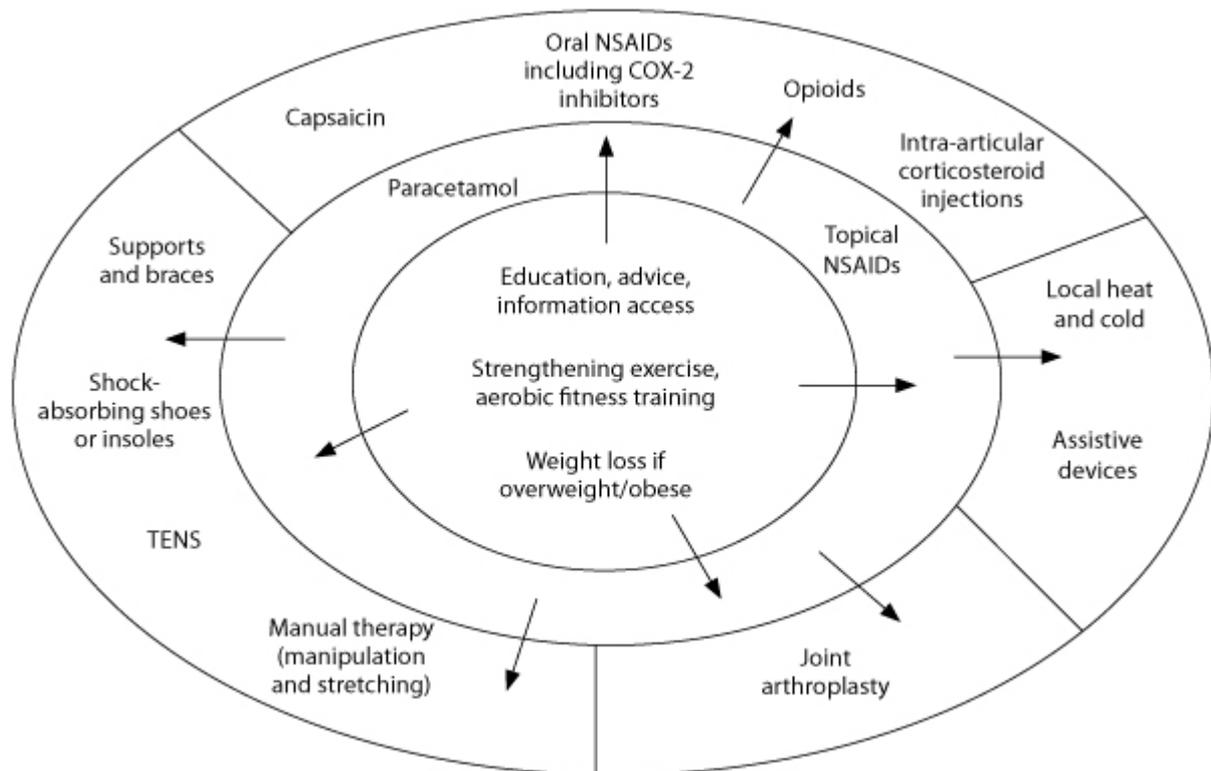
- Pain
- Stiffness and reduced movement at the joint
- Swelling of the joint
- Grating or grinding sensations and sounds in the joint (crepitus)

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What can I do to help myself?

Treatment and management strategies aim to reduce the work load of the joint, manage the pain and maintain the use of the joint. Osteoarthritis is a long term condition and self-management is the key. Surgery is a final step in managing osteoarthritis and your GP and Consultant (Orthopaedic Surgeon) will ensure you have explored all possible conservative management approaches, before deciding on this as a treatment option.

Below is a diagram that depicts the treatment of osteoarthritis with the strongest clinical evidence in the centre.



Weight management

Being overweight or obese makes osteoarthritis worse as extra weight puts more strain on the joints. Joints in the lower limbs that carry your weight are more commonly affected if you are overweight or obese.

To find out if you are overweight or obese, use the [Healthy weight calculator](#).

If you are overweight, try to lose weight by doing more physical activity and eating a healthier diet. Occupational Health nurses or Your GP can advise you how to lose weight slowly and safely.

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Activity

Wear the right shoes / insoles:

Wearing well cushioned shoes or insoles in your shoes as much as possible helps to reduce stress on the joints in the spine and the legs.

Exercise

If osteoarthritis causes you pain and stiffness, you may think exercise will make your symptoms worse. This is not the case. Exercise is the most important treatment for osteoarthritis, whatever your age or level of fitness. Regular exercise protects the joints by keeping the muscles that support the joints strong. This takes some of the pressure off the joints and helps to improve the symptoms.

Exercise is also good for relieving stress, losing weight and improving your posture. All of which can improve your symptoms.

Your physical activity should include a combination of strengthening and low impact aerobic exercises such as walking, cycling or swimming. Lots of walking and weight-bearing activity can increase your pain. Participating in a variety of activities or changing the type of exercise you do regularly will help to prevent your pain from being exacerbated.

It is important to strike the right balance between exercise and rest. The best advice for most people is to exercise little and often.

Before commencing any exercise programme, it is important to discuss it with your GP if you have any health concerns.

Pain relief

Simple analgesia such as paracetamol and an anti-inflammatory such as Ibuprofen can be very effective for the treatment of arthritis. You can obtain advice regarding medication from your local pharmacist or GP, but remember to read the packet and do not take over the recommended dosage.

Topical anti-inflammatory products in the form of a cream or gel can also be used. These are applied directly to the specific area of pain. They can help reduce the pain and inflammation without the side effects of the anti-inflammatory tablets. For further information you should discuss this option with your GP or pharmacist.

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Alternative medication

Capsin cream and glucosamine 1,500mg daily have been shown to offer some relief to symptoms of arthritis. However these are not recommended by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) guidelines as they failed to meet research standards and cost effective analysis.

Ice Packs

Ice can be very effective in reducing the pain that results from arthritis.

Do not use ice if you have circulatory problems, such as Raynaud's disease, history of cold induced hypertension, peripheral vascular disease, allergy to cold (urticaria joint pain) or sickle cell anaemia. If your skin is usually numb over the injured area, please speak to your physiotherapist or GP before using a cold pack / ice.

Ice must be used correctly otherwise ice burns can occur. Please see the instructions below:

- Start by wetting a cloth under a cold tap and then wring the cloth out until it is just damp.
- Place the damp cloth over affected area and then place either a plastic bag of crushed ice or a packet of frozen peas on top of the cloth. (The ice should be in small pieces in order to mould better to the area and help prevent ice burns).
- Leave the ice pack and cloth in place for approximately 10-15 minutes and repeat 3 to 4 times a day.

It is normal for your skin to go slightly red or pink, however remove the ice if extreme redness/pain, blistering or an increase in swelling occurs. If this does occur, please call NHS Direct for further advice.

Heat

Heat can help alleviate some of the pain associated with arthritis and particularly muscle ache. You can use either a microwavable wheat pack or use hot water bottle. It is important not to put directly on to your skin in order to avoid burning yourself.

Wrap the heat source up in a towel and apply to the affected area. This should be done for 20-30 minutes and can be repeated every hour.

WARNING – do not apply heat of areas of skin that have altered sensation

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TENS therapy:

Some people have found that Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulator (TENS) machines help to ease the pain from osteoarthritis. A TENS machine delivers small electrical pulses to the body via electrodes placed on the skin. These can be bought at some supermarkets, pharmacies or on line. Always read the instructions before using the machine and if unsure seek advice from a medical professional.

What about work

Osteoarthritis is a chronic condition and from time to time you will experience an increase in your symptoms (flare ups) which will make work more difficult. Try to stay active at work or return to work as soon as possible. This is an important part of your management plan and will help to prevent your joint(s) stiffening and the muscles surrounding the joint weakening.

Remember...

Flare ups do settle down. You do not have to be pain free to return to or remain at work.

If you are unable to perform your role during a flare up, it may be possible to negotiate lighter or modified duties with your manager. These changes are often only needed for a short period but can help to facilitate your recovery and help you when at work.

What should I do if I am still experiencing problems?

If you are unable to agree on restricted roles with you manager or you are still having problems despite following this advice then your Occupational Health team can help. The Occupational Health team can advise you on how to bridge the gap to help you return to normal activities. You can also gain access to the Occupational Health physiotherapist by:

Self referral

The Occupational Health service provides assessment and treatment of musculoskeletal problems that affect your ability to work. Staff are able to self refer to physiotherapy via the intranet Occupational Health web page

<http://nuth-vintranet1/cms/SupportServices/OccupationalHealth.aspx>

Management referral

If you feel your symptoms are having significant effect on your ability to carry out your role, discuss this with your manager and request a referral to the Occupational Health Physiotherapy team. The physiotherapist can assess your joints and advise you on how to keep safe at work and avoid further problems.

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For more information on arthritis or how to stay active, follow the links below:



www.nhs.uk/Pages/HomePage.aspx



www.nhsinform.co.uk



Providing answers today and tomorrow

<http://www.arthritisresearchuk.org>



ARTHRITIS CARE

*Empowering
people with arthritis.*

<http://www.arthritiscare.org.uk/Home>



Active Newcastle

www.activenewcastle.co.uk/

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NewcastleOHS

Physiotherapy Team
Ground Floor
Regent Centre
Regent farm road
Gosforth
NE3 3HD

Tel: (0191) 2821188

newcastle.ohs@nhs.net

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