

# ALL ABOUT ARTHRITIS

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## **Introduction:**

Arthritis is one of the most common diseases worldwide and is the leading cause of disability. It primarily affects people over the age of 45 years and is more common in women than men.

According to studies one out of every five adults are affected by one of the 100 different types of arthritis. The disease affects joints, skin, muscles and other organs. The most common type of arthritis is osteoarthritis which only affects the joints. In fact, most people over the age of 50 years show some signs of osteoarthritis as joints naturally degenerate over time. Other common types are Rheumatoid Arthritis and Septic Arthritis.

Fortunately, arthritis can be managed through a combination of medication, exercise, rest, body weight management, nutrition, and, in some cases, surgery. Having a positive mental outlook and the support of family and friends greatly help the patient in coping with the disease and to continue to perform daily activities.

## **What causes arthritis?**

The exact cause is not known and it is believed that there is a combination of factors which contribute to the development of arthritis like increasing age, a family history of the disease, overuse or abuse of a particular joint, injury, being overweight, and other diseases. Rheumatoid Arthritis may be an inherited disease that is triggered by a virus, bacteria, use of a medication, or excessive stress. Likewise other forms of arthritis run in families.

## **How Arthritis affects a joint?**

A joint is an area where two bones meet. The ends of the bones are covered and padded with a protective coating called cartilage which normally contains fluid and elastic tissue, and reduces friction as the joint moves. Osteoarthritis, the most common form of arthritis, occurs when that protective coating wears away as the age increases and the two bones begin to rub against one another. As we grow older, parts of our body wear out and so does cartilage and by the time we are 50 years old, there is a 90 percent chance that we will have some visible changes in our cartilage.

## **Arthritis can affect all joints**

Most often the weight-bearing joints, such as the hips, knees and spine, are affected by osteoarthritis. However other joints like shoulder, elbow, wrist, hand and ankle joints may also be affected by the disease. Rheumatoid arthritis typically affects small joints such as finger and wrist

## **Signs and Symptoms of Arthritis**

The common signs are swelling, redness, tenderness in and around the joint whereas common symptoms include joint pain, stiffness and restricted movement of joints. The symptoms may begin suddenly or develop gradually over time and may also include sleeplessness, fatigue, depression, and muscle aches.

Many people experience some sort of difficulty following their routine, at home, at work or at play because of joint pain, stiffness and loss of motion regardless of the type of arthritis they have. Getting out of bed in the morning, closing buttons, writing, sewing, meal preparation, dressing, sleeping, walking, climbing stairs, standing up from a chair or a toilet seat and attending to matters of personal hygiene may all be impaired to some degree by arthritis pain and joint stiffness.

## **When to see your doctor? Where to Turn First for Help**

Aches and pains are common in the human body and usually go away after a few days. However, if the symptoms, described above, persist for over 2 weeks, one should see his doctor for a definite diagnosis and necessary treatment.

By consulting a doctor on time, you can start on a treatment plan that will help slowing the progression of the disease and will protect your joints. Avoiding excess stress, maintaining an ideal body weight and using assistive devices to help you in your routine activities are complement to the medical treatment. A major goal of any arthritis treatment is preservation or improvement of daily tasks.

Your doctor will typically ask you the following questions to determine what type of arthritis you have:

- Where do you feel the pain
- When does it hurts
- Since how long the pain is there
- Is there any swelling or redness

- If anyone else in your family has a type of arthritis

## **Treatment of Arthritis**

Although most forms of arthritis are chronic, there are effective steps you can take to relieve the pain, improve mobility, and reduce inflammation and joint damage. Because there are so many forms of the disease, and because each form can cause different problems, it is essential that a treatment plan be tailored to your specific needs. The treatment usually includes medicines, lifestyle modifications and sometimes surgery.

- Medications
- Exercise
- Managing Stress
- Weight reduction
- Surgery

### **Medications:**

There are no medications that can completely cure arthritis however these can effectively provide relief from pain and inflammation. Since medication is an important part of the treatment you should be well aware of all aspects of your medical therapy including the side effects.

### **Exercise is of utmost importance:**

Regular exercise actually helps relieve pain and also prevent arthritis symptoms from getting worse. Pain is a common problem that keeps many arthritis sufferers from exercising but a physical therapist can design a suitable exercise program which is comfortable for you.

### **Weight reduction:**

Extra weight puts stress on the joints and therefore maintaining an ideal body weight greatly helps in managing arthritis. A diet that provides good nutrition and safely helps you to lose extra weight is recommended.

### **Surgery:**

Joint replacement and other types of surgeries provide marked relief in pain and restore physical function in patients with advanced disease leading to deformity and disability. Joint replacement techniques have advanced in the last 25 years making this surgery highly successful.

In summary, arthritis does not mean an end to your active lifestyle. With timely diagnosis and proper treatment most people are able to live a fulfilling life.

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