

Understanding Arthritis

What is osteoarthritis?

Osteoarthritis (OA) is one of the most common causes of joint pain. Sometimes called degenerative arthritis or degenerative joint disease, it is a condition that involves the breakdown of joint cartilage. Cartilage is a rubbery tissue that covers the ends of moving bones in joints. It acts as both a shock absorber and a lubricant, protecting your bones from damage and providing smooth, pain-free movement.



An arthritic hip joint



Partial knee arthritis

Arthritis Pain

As joint cartilage wears away, the bones begin to make painful bone-on-bone contact. The early stages of osteoarthritis can be treated with a variety of conservative, non-surgical treatments. However, as the joint cartilage continues to wear away and the symptoms of osteoarthritis become more severe, surgery may be recommended to correct the damaged bone and cartilage.

To diagnose your condition, an orthopedic surgeon will observe your movement and review your health history. An X-ray of the affected joint will show signs of cartilage wear, and the severity of the cartilage destruction can help determine the best course of treatment.



An X-ray showing severe right hip arthritis

Often the cause of arthritis is unknown, but osteoarthritis may develop as a result of injury to the joint, excess body weight, or years of wear and tear on the joint cartilage. There is no known cure. Other

well-known causes of arthritis requiring joint replacement are; Rheumatoid arthritis, previous trauma or infection and Pagets disease. The best that surgeons can do for patients is to restore motion and reduce pain. Fortunately, total joint replacement has generally proven quite effective at accomplishing these goals.

The joints most commonly affected by osteoarthritis are the knees, hips, fingers, and shoulders. Osteoarthritis symptoms include, but are not limited to:

- Joint pain while standing or moving
- Giving way or locking of joint
- Near constant pain
- Decreased activity
- Abnormal stance or walk

Treatment

There are a number of non-surgical treatments for osteoarthritis. Moderate doctor-prescribed exercise and physical therapy are excellent ways to keep your joints moving and to help relieve moderate joint pain. Joints that are not regularly exercised can become tight and painful.

Excess body weight places extreme pressure on the joints. If you are overweight, your doctor may recommend weight loss to help relieve unwanted stress and pain in your joints.

Pain relievers, such as acetaminophen or medications known as nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), can help control swelling and pain. It is important to consult your doctor before taking medication for joint pain.

Assistive devices, such as a cane or walker, can help reduce the pressure placed on joints and alleviate some pain. Resting after activity can also help control moderate joint pain.

The final treatment option for painful joints affected by arthritis is joint replacement surgery. This technique uses prosthetic implants to replace the damaged sections of bone and cartilage in the joint. The

purpose of the procedure is to restore function and mobility and to provide relief from joint pain.

The most common reason joints are replaced is osteoarthritis, which is the diagnosis in 90% of patients receiving a new joint.