

Osteoarthritis

Osteoarthritis is caused by cartilage loss in the joints.

Cartilage acts like a cushion that allows smooth joint movement and thus prevents us from feeling pain. The cartilage wears down over time, which causes pain and loss of movement.

What are the causes of osteoarthritis?

- It appears and gets worse with age.
- Overweight further aggravates knee or hip osteoarthritis.
- Some works or sports cause a bigger load on some joints, leading to the development of osteoarthritis in them in the course of time.

Where is it mostly located?

While osteoarthritis may concern any joint in the body, it mainly affects the spine (neck and lower back), the knees, the hips and the hands.

How is it diagnosed?

The doctor will focus on symptoms and on physical examination (pain, loss of movement, joint deformities). X-rays may sometimes be required to confirm diagnosis and severity.

How is it treated?

No drug product can cure or delay the evolution of osteoarthritis. However, drug products are available to reduce pain, improve joint movement and, sometimes, remove discomfort.

Moderate exercise, such as walking on flat ground, swimming, mild gymnastics... is good for knee, hip and back osteoarthritis. You should gradually increase the duration of your exercise up to 45-60 minutes, 3 to 5 days a week.

Hand exercises are effective against finger osteoarthritis. Avoid painful exercises. Do not

overwork a sore joint. Rest for a few days and resume your normal activities when it gets better. Use heat to relieve pain and stiffness, but use cold for a few days when your joint is very inflamed.

Use comfortable, low-heeled, shock-absorbing shoes.

In case of knee or hip osteoarthritis, a walking stick will help you relieve your pain and give your body a steadier feeling. Always hold the stick in the hand opposite to your weaker side.

Very severe knee or hip osteoarthritis may require surgery.

Can osteoarthritis be prevented?

No preventive drug products are presently available.

Preventive measures:

- Avoid or reduce repetitive joint movements typical of specific workers (miners, jackhammer operators, hairdressers, bricklayers, etc.) or specific sports (dancers, football players and runners).
- Avoid gaining weight to prevent osteoarthritis from aggravating.
- Avoid exercising with vibration machines (power plate machines)
- You must move, stretch and strengthen your joints every day to keep them supple and strong so as to prevent osteoarthritis and its progression.

Your family doctor will diagnose and follow up your osteoarthritis, and will recommend the best treatment to relieve pain and the best type of exercise for you.

