

Arthritis

What is arthritis?

Arthritis is a condition that causes pain and stiffness of the joints. It sometimes also causes redness or swelling. In severe cases, joints may become deformed.

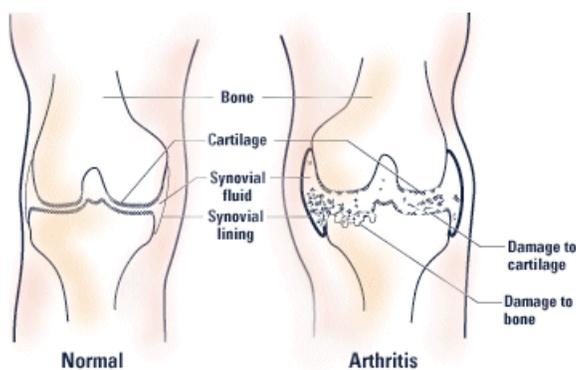
There are different kinds of arthritis. Two common forms are osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis. Symptoms of osteoarthritis begin to appear by middle age. Most people over age 60 have some osteoarthritis, although they may not have symptoms. Rheumatoid arthritis usually starts in early adulthood or middle age. Both osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis are three times more common in women than in men.

Examples of other forms of arthritis include gout and arthritis that occurs after an injury or with certain infections, such as gonorrhea.

How does it occur?

Osteoarthritis causes the breakdown of the cartilage cushioning in joints. It can also cause the bones in joints to become rough. Osteoarthritis occurs most often in weight-bearing joints, such as the spine, knees, and hips. It also often affects the fingers.

Rheumatoid arthritis affects the lining of the joints. It is thought to be an autoimmune disease. This means that the body's defenses against infection attack the body's own tissue. It causes inflammation (redness and swelling), stiffness, and deformity, especially in the joints of the hands, arms, and feet.



What are the symptoms?

Possible symptoms of arthritis include:

- mild to severe pain in joints
- red, swollen joints
- stiffness and limited movement, especially in the morning
- deformed joints.

How is it diagnosed?



Your health care provider will review your medical history and examine you. He or she may order blood tests and x-rays to confirm the diagnosis and measure the extent of the disease.



How is it treated?

The goal of treatment is to keep the joints working properly by:

- relieving pain and stiffness
- reducing any swelling.

Acetaminophen (Tylenol) is usually the first choice for medicine to control pain.

Other medicines, including anti-inflammatories (such as aspirin, ibuprofen, and COX2 inhibitors) are also often used. These medicines control the chemicals that cause swelling. Your health care provider will prescribe the medicine that is best for the kind of arthritis you have.



Controlling your weight will reduce strain on weight-bearing joints.



Physical therapy can help keep your muscles strong and movement of your joints as normal as possible.



If your hips or knees are severely damaged, your health care provider may recommend surgically replacing them.

How long will the effects last?

If you have arthritis, you will probably have it for the rest of your life. How

often you have symptoms of arthritis depends, at least in part, on the type of arthritis you have. You might be reminded of the arthritis every time you use the affected joints. Or you may have periods when you have symptoms and then other times when you do not.

How can I take care of myself?

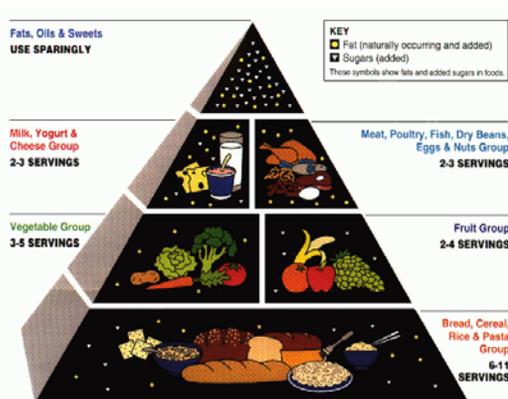
Take the medicine your health care provider recommends for controlling your arthritis.



Follow your provider's advice for weight control if you are overweight.

Do the exercises recommended by your health care provider or physical therapist.

Keep your body healthy by eating a healthy, varied, low-fat diet.



What can I do to prevent arthritis?

No one knows how to prevent arthritis. However, it is a condition that can usually be managed by taking regular medicine, protecting the affected joints, and keeping the joints mobile.

Developed by Ann Carter, MD, for McKesson Clinical Reference Systems.

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