

Joint Pain

Causes and Pain Relief Options

Osteoarthritis is one of the most frequent causes of physical disability among seniors. It occurs when cartilage, the tissue that cushions the ends of the bones within the joints, breaks down and wears away. In some cases, all of the cartilage may wear away, leaving bones that rub up against each other.

Symptoms range from stiffness and mild pain that comes and goes to severe joint pain. Osteoarthritis affects hands, the lower back, neck and weight-bearing joints such as knees, hips and feet. Putting too much stress on a joint that has been previously injured, improper alignment of joints and excess weight all may contribute to the development of osteoarthritis. Some common signs of osteoarthritis include:

- Joint pain, swelling, and tenderness
- Stiffness after getting out of bed
- A crunching feeling or sound of bone rubbing on bone

Not everyone with osteoarthritis feels pain, however. In fact, only a third of people with x-ray evidence of osteoarthritis report pain or other symptoms.

Osteoarthritis treatment plans often include ways to manage pain and improve function. These can include exercise, rest, pain relief, weight control, medicines and surgery. Current treatments for osteoarthritis can relieve symptoms such as pain and disability, but right now, there are no treatments that can cure osteoarthritis.

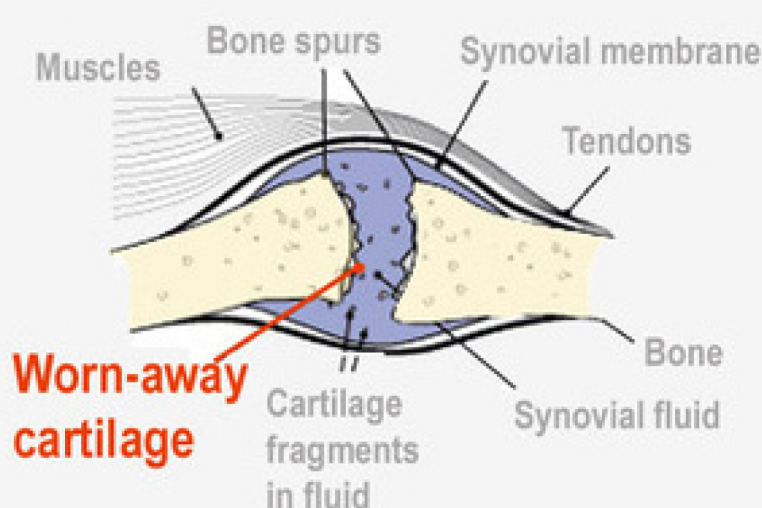
There are a number of medicines that your doctor can prescribe to help reduce the pain associated with osteoarthritis. The most common prescription is acetaminophen. If this doesn't relieve pain, then non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as ibuprofen and naproxen may be used. Some NSAIDs are available over the counter, while

more than a dozen others, including a subclass called COX-2 inhibitors, are available only with a prescription. Other medications, such as corticosteroids, hyaluronic acid and topical creams are also available. With all medications, make sure that you follow the prescription orders exactly.

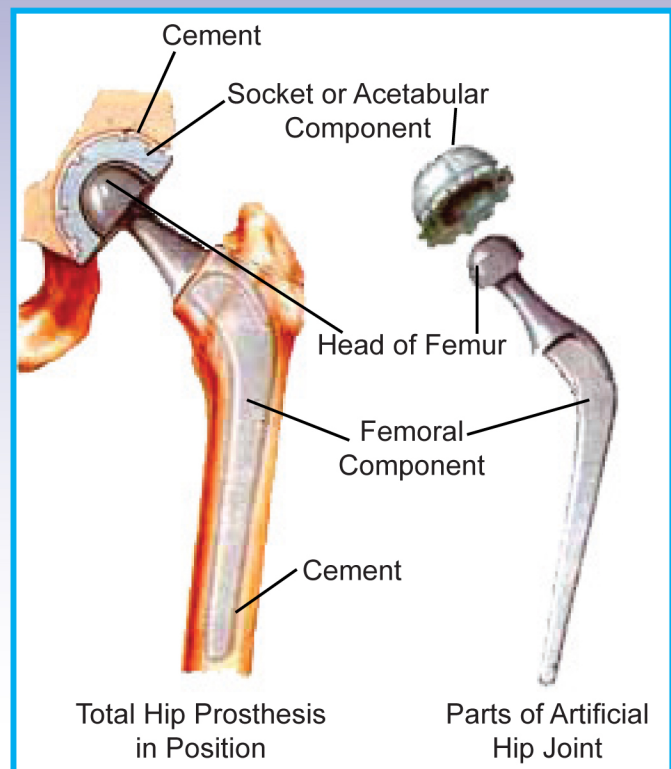
For some people, surgery helps relieve the pain and disability of osteoarthritis. A doctor may perform surgery to smooth out, fuse and reposition bones or to replace joints. The decision to have surgery depends on numerous factors and the patient should consider their level of disability, intensity of pain, lifestyle, age and activity level in consultation with their physician.

For temporary relief of pain from osteoarthritis, you can use warm towels, hot packs, or a warm bath or shower. In some cases, cold packs such as a bag of ice or frozen vegetables wrapped in a towel can relieve pain or numb the sore area. For osteoarthritis in the knee, wearing insoles or cushioned shoes may reduce joint stress.

A Joint With Osteoarthritis



Joint Replacement Surgery and You



The purpose of joint replacement surgery is to remove a damaged joint and put in a new artificial one. This process can help relieve pain and help you move and feel better. Hips and knees are replaced the most often, however, other joints can be replaced as well, including the shoulders, fingers, ankles, and elbows.

An artificial joint is made of a combination of plastic and metal. Once the damaged joint is removed, the artificial joint is cemented into place. After it is in place, it acts in the same manner as the natural joint and generally lasts at least ten to fifteen years before it needs to be replaced.

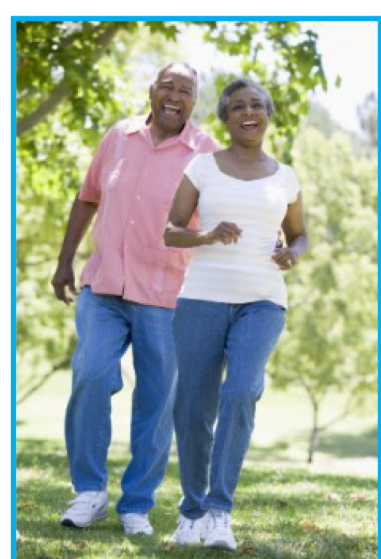


DO I NEED TO HAVE MY JOINT REPLACED?

Only a doctor can tell if you need a joint replaced. After looking at your joint, the doctor may say that you should consider exercise, walking aids such as braces or canes, physical therapy, or medicines and vitamin supplements. Medicines for arthritis include drugs that reduce inflammation. Depending on the type of arthritis, the doctor may prescribe corticosteroids or other drugs.

WHAT IF I NEED SURGERY?

Joint replacement is often the answer if you have constant pain and can't move the joint well—for example, if you have trouble with things such as walking, climbing stairs, and taking a bath. With knee or hip surgery, you will probably need to stay in the hospital for a few days. If you are elderly or have additional disabilities, you may then need to spend several weeks in an intermediate-care facility before going home. You and your team of doctors will determine how long you stay in the hospital.



After hip or knee replacement, you will often stand or begin walking the day of surgery. At first, you will walk with a walker or crutches. You may have some temporary pain in the new joint because your muscles are weak from not being used and your body is healing. The pain can be helped with medicines and should end in a few weeks or months.

Physical therapy can begin the day after surgery to help strengthen the muscles around the new joint and help you regain motion in the joint. A physical therapist will help you with gentle, range-of-motion exercises. Before you leave the hospital, your therapist will show you exercises that can be done at home.