

Paul D Maitino DO FAOAO Hip Knee Shoulder & sports medicine Oklahoma City OK

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Osteoarthritis

What is osteoarthritis (OA)?

Osteoarthritis (OA) is the most common form of arthritis in the world.¹ You may have heard OA referred to as "wear and tear" arthritis. When OA begins to affect one of your joints, a series of reactions take place that actually begin to degrade your once-healthy bone and the "soft tissue" around the joint – tendons and cartilage. Once the cartilage that normally cushions and protects the bones of the joint breaks down, the bones of your joint eventually rub directly against each other. Your body reacts to this by creating bone spurs and the joint capsule itself may thicken and weaken. Inflammation eventually sets in.

Doctors talk about two kinds of OA. Primary OA often refers to "everyday wear"; Secondary OA is considered the result of a malaligned joint, being overweight, injury or overuse.^{1, 2}

Who does OA affect?

Twenty-one million people are affected by OA in the United States alone.³ Although OA can affect anyone at any age, it has been linked to the aging process. More than 50% of everyone over 65 has OA symptoms in one or both knees. By 75, virtually everyone suffers with OA in one or more joints. In fact, OA of the knee and hips continues to be the most common cause of arthritis-related disability for Americans. The Arthritis Foundation cites that men and women may develop OA at different times in life. Most people develop symptoms after 45, but, as a group, men under 55 and women over 55 develop OA more frequently.

What are the symptoms of OA?

Although some people who have osteoarthritis say they feel no pain, most people who have OA experience pain, feel joint stiffness (especially in the morning), show signs of swelling and tenderness in one or more joints and may even hear a crunching sound in their joints. For some people, OA can become completely debilitating.³

In order to diagnose you properly, your doctor will consider your symptoms and your medical history, examine your joint(s) and order one or more diagnostic tests. Your

doctor may order blood work, X-rays, a CT scan or an MRI to get a clear view of the alignment of your painful joint and its condition.

How is OA treated?

Your doctor may recommend different treatment options depending on the severity of your osteoarthritis and its impact on your joint(s).

Manage the pain.

Your doctor may prescribe or recommend the use of anti-inflammatory medications (like aspirin or ibuprofen) and cold packs that may help to reduce inflammation as well as the pain associated with arthritis. Sometimes a local injection of cortisone helps to further reduce inflammation.

Look at the big picture.

Your doctor may recommend that you lose weight, take certain nutritional supplements and exercise. In some cases, a physical therapist may help provide pain relief and the return of some lost mobility through guided exercise and other techniques.

Get the right support.

Orthotic devices sometimes help. Custom-made shoes and shoe inserts provide support for those with OA in the foot or ankle. Your doctor may recommend a brace or a cane to help take some of the pressure off your affected joint while you walk if OA is affecting your knee or hip.

Understand your surgical options.

If you are still experiencing arthritis pain and joint damage that's affecting your quality of life even after all other conservative measures have been taken, your doctor may suggest surgery to help relieve your pain and restore your mobility. Your doctor will determine the proper surgical treatment based on the severity of your arthritis and its location. Today, a full range of surgical solutions exist that enable your doctor to customize surgical procedures to your particular needs and anatomy, whether you need arthroscopic debridement (removing inflamed and/or irritating debris from the joint), arthrodesis (fusing the joint for greater support) or arthroplasty (replacing the arthritic joint).

Be sure to talk with your doctor about the best treatment option for you.