

# OSTEOARTHRITIS

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## A BRIEF GUIDE FOR PATIENTS - JOINT PAIN

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How to seek help for your osteoarthritis  
How your health care professional can support you  
Who to talk to about your joint pain  
Feeling positive  
Further information

# Osteoarthritis won't necessarily get worse

Osteoarthritis, otherwise known as joint pain, is a common problem that can cause pain and stiffness in many joints in the body, such as the hips, knees or hand joints. It is more common in people aged 45 years or over, but younger people can also suffer from it. **The exact cause of osteoarthritis is unknown**, but genetic factors, other medical problems, the type of jobs or sports people do, previous injury and being overweight can all make people more vulnerable to having osteoarthritis.

Medical understanding of osteoarthritis is changing. Now we know that **osteoarthritis is a complex problem** and affects all of the joint, not just the cartilage (the material that covers the end of joints, helping them to move over one another). It is actually a process where the joint is trying to heal or repair itself - it is changing.

In some instances bone can overgrow and so the joint does not always go back to its previous state, for example, you might notice bony swellings as a result of osteoarthritis. Osteoarthritis is the result of changes to the joint.

It's important to remember that **symptoms of osteoarthritis can vary over time**, between joints and between people. Although osteoarthritis is a long term health condition **it does not mean you will get progressively worse**. Only a small number of people with osteoarthritis will ever require surgery. However, for the right patient, this can be an effective treatment.



**Osteoarthritis is the result of the joint trying to heal itself, resulting in changes**

The good news is there are things you can do to manage your symptoms



## Health Care Professionals



WHO CAN I TALK TO ABOUT MY JOINT PAIN?

### Physiotherapist

Physiotherapists help to restore or improve movement and function when someone is affected with joint pain, through education and advice, tailored exercise or physical activity advice.

### Practice nurse

Practice nurses work in GP surgeries where they plan and provide care, treatment and health education to patients with joint pain.

### Occupational Therapist

Occupational therapists help you to improve your ability to do everyday tasks if you're having difficulties with your joints. They can help with aids, devices and alternative ways of doing things.

### GP

Your General Practitioner can help you to manage your condition in the long term, prescribe medication and exercise, offer advice or refer you for further treatment.

### Physician Associate

Physician Associates support doctors in the diagnosis and management of patients

### Podiatrist

Podiatrists diagnose and treat joint pain in the feet and legs. They help keep people mobile and active, give advice on caring for foot pain and can advise on footwear.

### Pharmacist

Pharmacists can help you with your joint pain, by providing advice on pain relief and alternative treatments. You can ask for a private consultation with your pharmacist to discuss your arthritis.

## How healthcare professionals can support you to manage your osteoarthritis by:

- Providing you with written information and advice on how to move your joints regularly to keep them healthy
- Supporting you to lose weight and keep active
- Advising on appropriate pain control, such as rub-on creams containing non-steroidal anti-inflammatories, use of heat and cold
- Giving information on aids to help you and adaptations you can make

## Seeking help for osteoarthritis

- The good news is, there are things you can do to improve your symptoms
- Healthcare professionals can offer extra support to help you to manage your condition
- X-rays are not usually needed for diagnosis

# You can help your joints by keeping active



## Feeling positive

- Feeling down and frustrated is a natural and understandable reaction to experiencing pain and stiffness which can make it hard to get out and about, socialise and do your usual activities.
- Both general physical activity, for example walking, swimming, cycling and specific muscle strengthening exercises for joints are an essential part of managing your osteoarthritis and can also help with your general feeling of wellbeing.
- Continuing with social activities and hobbies is important for staying positive, which in turn makes it easier to cope with symptoms of osteoarthritis.

## Further help

Keele University have developed a comprehensive guide to living with osteoarthritis. To access it, click here:  
[www.jigsaw-e.com/patient-focus/guidebook/](http://www.jigsaw-e.com/patient-focus/guidebook/)

Or, hold your phone camera over this code:



You may find the Keele Pain Recorder app useful, to help you to monitor your pain and start to understand what makes it better:  
[www.keele.ac.uk/kpr/](http://www.keele.ac.uk/kpr/)

For further advice and support about arthritis, visit the Versus Arthritis website:  
[www.versusarthritis.org/](http://www.versusarthritis.org/)  
or call the helpline on 0800 5200 520



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