

## Osteoarthritis

Osteoarthritis is the most common form of arthritis among older people, and it is one of the most frequent causes of physical disability among older adults.

The disease affects both men and women. Before age 45, osteoarthritis is more common in men than in women. After age 45, osteoarthritis is more common in women.

Osteoarthritis 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 of Osteoarthritis

Symptoms range from stiffness and mild pain that comes and goes to severe joint pain. Common signs include joint pain, swelling, and tenderness; stiffness after getting out of bed; and a crunching feeling or sound of bone rubbing on bone. Not everyone with osteoarthritis feels [pain](#).

Osteoarthritis most commonly affects the hands, lower back, neck, and weight-bearing joints such as knees, hips, and feet. Osteoarthritis affects just joints, not internal organs.

### Hands

Osteoarthritis of the hands seems to run in families. If your mother or grandmother has or had osteoarthritis in their hands, you're at greater-than-average risk of having it, too. Women are more likely than men to have osteoarthritis in the hands. For most women, it develops after [menopause](#).

When osteoarthritis involves the hands, small, bony knobs may appear on the end joints (those closest to the nails) of the fingers. They are called Heberden's (HEBerr-denz) nodes. Similar knobs, called Bouchard's (boo-SHARDZ) nodes, can appear on the middle joints of the fingers. Fingers can become enlarged and gnarled, and they may ache or be stiff and numb. The base of the thumb joint also is commonly affected by osteoarthritis.

### Knees

The knees are among the joints most commonly affected by osteoarthritis. Symptoms of knee osteoarthritis include stiffness, swelling, and pain, which make it hard to walk, climb, and get in and out of chairs and bathtubs. Osteoarthritis in the knees can lead to disability.

### Hips

The hips are also common sites of osteoarthritis. As with knee osteoarthritis, symptoms of hip osteoarthritis include pain and stiffness of the joint itself. But sometimes pain is felt in the groin, inner thigh, buttocks, or even

the knees. Osteoarthritis of the hip may limit moving and bending, making daily activities such as dressing and putting on shoes a challenge.

## Spine

Osteoarthritis of the spine may show up as stiffness and pain in the neck or lower back. In some cases, arthritis-related changes in the spine can cause pressure on the nerves where they exit the spinal column, resulting in weakness, tingling, or numbness of the arms and legs. In severe cases, this can even affect [bladder](#) and bowel function.

## Causes and Risk Factors of Osteoarthritis

Researchers suspect that osteoarthritis is caused by a combination of factors in the body and the environment. The chance of developing osteoarthritis increases with age.

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.

## Diagnosis of Osteoarthritis

To make a diagnosis of osteoarthritis, most doctors use a combination of methods and tests, including a medical history, a physical examination, x-rays, and laboratory tests.

## Treatment Goals: Manage Pain and Improve Function

Osteoarthritis treatment plans often include [exercise](#), rest and joint care, pain relief, weight control, [medicines](#), surgery, and [complementary](#) treatment approaches. Current treatments for osteoarthritis can relieve symptoms such as pain and disability, but there are no treatments that can cure the condition.

Although health care professionals can prescribe or recommend treatments to help you manage your arthritis, the real key to living well with the disease is you. Research shows that people with osteoarthritis who take part in their own care report less pain and make fewer doctor visits. They also enjoy a better quality of life.

Learn more about [treatments for osteoarthritis](#) from the [National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases](#).

## For More Information on Osteoarthritis

### National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases

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### National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health

888-644-6226

866-464-3615 (TTY)

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### U.S. Food and Drug Administration

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