

What You Need To Know About Arthritis

Osteoarthritis

Osteoarthritis (OA) is characterized by pain, stiffness, limited range of motion, and mechanical irregularities in the affected joint. While inflammation is not directly caused by OA, it is not uncommon for arthritic joints to swell due to erosion of the joint tissue. OA may also create bony enlargements around the joints (a phenomenon often seen in people with arthritic hands). For some people, OA is a minor annoyance; for others, however, the disease is a serious, even disabling condition.

Although OA can occur in any joint, it usually affects one or more of the following areas: the hand, shoulder, neck, lower back, hip and knee.

The joint cartilage is normally smooth, shiny and wet; in a healthy joint, the cartilage-covered surfaces move against each other with very little friction, like "glass on glass." Cartilage normally absorbs nutrients and fluid like a sponge, and this keeps the cartilage healthy and smooth. In osteoarthritis, however, the cartilage does not get the nutrients and fluid it requires. Eventually the cartilage dries out and develops cracks-instead of moving smoothly like glass on glass, the roughened cartilage moves like sandpaper against sandpaper. In extreme cases of cartilage loss there may be actual bone-on-bone contact within the joint.

In people over 65, osteoarthritis is the most frequently cited reason for limiting physical activity. This statistic is particularly alarming to health care professionals because inadequate physical activity is implicated in a host of serious physical problems, from muscle and bone degeneration to heart disease. Quality of life suffers too; by limiting mobility and functioning, OA can contribute to isolation, dependence, and depression.

Osteoarthritis is not always associated with aging; a traumatic injury or abrupt impact can trigger the disease as well. Falls, car accidents, and sports injuries are often implicated in the onset of OA. Traumatic osteoarthritis is a process that first causes degeneration of the cartilage and articular cartilage. Because the cartilage is no longer able to absorb shock and cushion bones, the joint is likely to become painful and feel stiff. As with OA associated with aging, traumatic OA can lead to a downward spiral of pain, inactivity, and deconditioning.

Extreme cases of OA may require surgery. However, OA responds well to conservative treatment. People with OA can directly influence the course of the disease through physical therapy and a regular program of moderate stretching and strengthening exercises. A positive mental attitude can also work wonders in helping you maintain a degree of control over the disease.

Courtesy of the American Physical Therapy Association
www.apta.org

254 River Vista Place, Twin Falls, ID 83301

208.734.7333 • 208.734.8350 (fax)
www.primarytherapysource.com



Treating you to a better life.