Osteoarthritis

Osteoarthritis (OA) is a chronic condition in which the cushion of your joints, also known as cartilage, wears down and causes symptoms such as joint stiffness, pain, and overall discomfort.

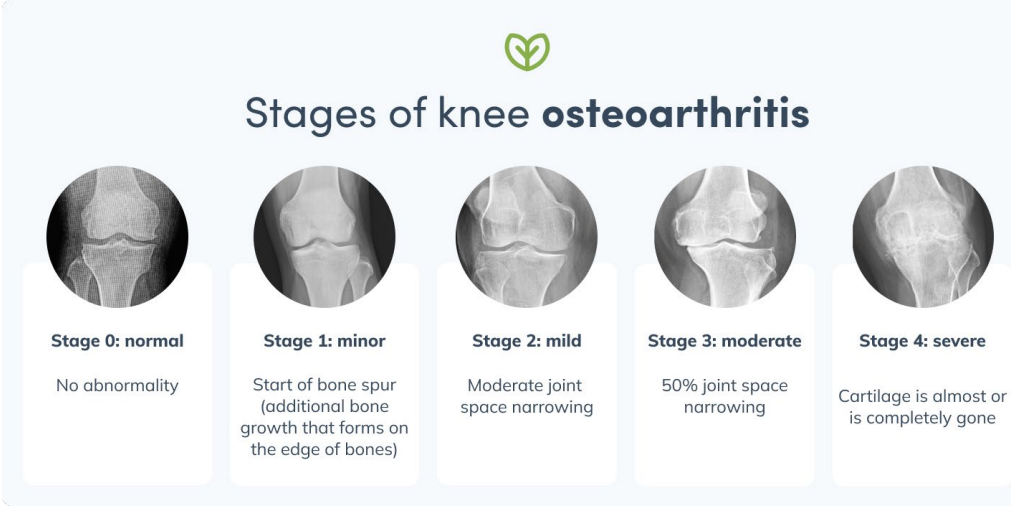
OA typically affects the knees, hips, hands, spine, and feet. It's the most common joint disease in the world that occurs as you age. Approximately 30.8 million American adults and 300 million individuals globally have OA.

Osteoarthritis classification

OA is classified as primary or secondary depending on the cause:

- **Primary:** joint cartilage degradation brought on by an **unknown** cause; however, age and wear and tear may be responsible
- **Secondary:** joint cartilage degradation brought on by a **known** cause such as joint trauma (e.g., injuries and surgeries) or an autoimmune condition (e.g., rheumatoid arthritis and psoriasis)

Stages of osteoarthritis





Signs, symptoms, and complications

Common symptoms of OA include:

- Loss of joint flexibility
- Joint pain
- Joint stiffness
- Joint swelling
- Joint tenderness

If left untreated, OA may result in certain complications, including:

- Bone spurs
- Nocturnal (nighttime) pain
- Reduced quality of life
- Sensitivity to the cold

Causes and risk factors

- Age (risk increases in those aged 40 and up)
- Diet low in nutrients
- Genetic predisposition
- Injury
- Obesity (having a body mass index (BMI) greater than 30)
- Repetitive joint use (such as occupation involving prolonged standing or repetitive knee bending)
- Sedentary (inactive) lifestyle
- Sex (more common in females than males)

Preventing and addressing osteoarthritis

OA is a common condition that is not only costly to both the individual and the healthcare system, but it is also a leading cause of disability. However, hope is not lost as there are ways to help reduce your symptoms and improve your overall quality of life.

Diet

Eating a diet focused on nutrient-rich, anti-inflammatory whole foods is the best course of action to reduce joint inflammation. Dietary examples of inflammation-reducing foods include oily fish such as mackerel, salmon, and anchovies; fruits and vegetables; and whole grains. A whole grain is defined as the grains itself, or foods made from them which contain all the essential parts and naturally occurring nutrients of the entire grain (endosperm, germ, and bran) in the same proportions as in the intact kernel.

Additionally, it's recommended to avoid overly processed foods and highly saturated fats. Examples of these include sugary cereals, pepperoni, fast foods, and palm oil. This is important because a diet high in saturated fat and sugar has a negative effect on the structural integrity of bones.



Anti-inflammatory **food pyramid**

Physical activity

Physical activity may help decrease the amount of pain and discomfort that you may be feeling. Additionally, it has the added benefit of improving your physical fitness and potentially your quality of life. Activities such as aerobic exercise, resistance training, and yoga performed regularly are safe and effective ways to manage symptoms, weight, and stress. An example of this would be participating in 150 minutes per week of moderate-intensity exercise such as water aerobics, jogging, or dancing. In addition, at least 45 minutes per week of lower-intensity activity such as casual walking or biking, yoga, and pilates has been shown to improve or maintain optimal physical fitness levels.

Sleep

Poor sleep quality is common among OA patients and contributes to significant fatigue. Additionally, dysregulated sleeping patterns such as constantly having a hard time falling asleep, waking up too early, and being unable to fall back asleep play an important role in pain. Specifically, sleep disturbances may impact how pain shows up or is experienced in the body. Therefore, it's important to identify the reasons for the sleep dysregulation and to correct them in order to reduce OA-related fatigue and pain.

There are several different ways to improve sleep quality, including:

- Avoiding caffeinated beverages in the evening
- Establishing a bedtime routine
- Limiting screen time prior to bed
- Using aromatherapy with lavender essential oil or valerian essential oil
- Utilizing white noise

Stress management

Stress is a normal part of everyday life. However, chronic stress can be detrimental to not only our bodies but our mental and emotional well-being too. This is no different when you are suffering from OA. Patients suffering from this condition report greater depression, stress, and behavioral-coping strategies, which are linked to worsening OA-associated pain and lower quality of life. As we are unable to completely eliminate stress from our lives, it's crucial that we learn to address it by:

1. Recognizing the signs and symptoms of stress, such as:

- Anxiety
- Loss of appetite
- Indigestion
- Headaches
- Muscle tension
- Sleeplessness

2. Managing stress using techniques like:

- Adding daily physical activity
- Eating a balanced diet
- Respecting your limits of energy and pain
- Setting a bedtime and morning routine
- Sharing your feelings and concerns

Weight management

An unhealthy weight increases the stress on the cartilage surrounding our joints. Therefore, maintaining a healthy weight based on age, sex, and height is critical in reducing joint discomfort with OA. There are many ways to maintain a healthy weight, but the most important thing to keep in mind is consistency not perfection. Therefore, choose an activity and a diet that you enjoy as that will increase your chances of sticking to it. Examples of this can include weekly meal prepping and daily walks.

Other lifestyle considerations

OA can be a debilitating condition. Studies show that peer groups, whether that be friends, family, or peer-led social support groups, not only provide emotional support but help patients stick to their treatment plans. As a result, patients may experience improved OA symptoms.

Strong and reliable support systems in which individuals feel comfortable, heard, and supported are an important consideration for managing joint pain.

Disclaimer

The information in this article is designed for educational purposes only and is not intended to be a substitute for informed medical advice or care. This information should not be used to diagnose or treat any health problems or illnesses without consulting a doctor. Consult with a healthcare practitioner before relying on any information in this article or on this website.



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