



## Body Conditions: OSTEOARTHRITIS (OA)

**Osteoarthritis** is the breakdown of cartilage in the joints. This is followed by chronic inflammation of the joint lining. Healthy cartilage is a cushion between the bones in a joint. Osteoarthritis usually affects the hands, feet, spine, hips, and knees. People with osteoarthritis usually have joint pain and limited movement of the affected joint.



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### Causes

The exact cause is unclear.

### Risk Factors

Factors that may increase your chance of developing osteoarthritis include:

- Increasing age
- Excess body weight
- Family history of osteoarthritis
- Certain endocrine, metabolic, or neuropathic disorders, avascular necrosis
- Having an injury or surgery to the joint surface, especially the cartilage
- Having an occupation or doing physical activities that put stress on joints

### Symptoms

Osteoarthritis may cause:

- Mild-to-severe pain in a joint, especially after overuse or long periods of inactivity, such as sitting for a long time
- Creaking or grating sound in the joint
- Swelling, stiffness, limited movement of the joint, especially in the morning
- Deformity of the joint

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### Diagnosis

Your doctor will ask about your symptoms and medical history. A physical exam will be done. Tests may include:

- X-ray to see internal bony structures
- CT scan to look at the extent of the arthritis
- Arthrocentesis to rule out other causes of arthritis
- Blood tests to rule out other causes of arthritis

### Treatment

The physical therapist's role is to help decrease your pain and swelling, increase your strength and range of motion, and develop a suitable and effective home exercise program that will reduce the overall symptoms of osteoarthritis. The treatment plan in physical therapy might consist of:

- Strengthening, endurance, and flexibility exercises
- Manual therapy
- Electrical stimulation (ESTIM)
- Heat or cold packs

### Prevention

To help reduce your chance of developing osteoarthritis, take these steps:

- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Do regular, gentle exercise, such as walking, stretching, swimming, or yoga.
- Avoid repetitive motions and risky activities that may contribute to joint injury, especially after age 40.
- With advancing age, certain activities may have to be stopped or modified. It is important to continue to be active, so find an activity that suits you.