

## Osteoarthritis

Osteoarthritis is a type of arthritis that is caused by the breakdown and eventual loss of the cartilage of one or more joints. Cartilage is a protein substance that serves as a "cushion" between the bones of the joints. Osteoarthritis is also known as degenerative arthritis. It can involve any joint, but usually concerns hands and weight-bearing joints such as hips, knees, feet and spine.

Osteoarthritis is by far the most common type of arthritis, and the percentage of people who have it grows higher with age. An estimated 12.1 percent of the U.S. population (nearly 21 million Americans) age 25 and older have osteoarthritis.

### Symptoms of Osteoarthritis

- Stiff or painful joints
- Creaking or grinding sounds when the affected joint is moved
- Stiffness after getting out of bed
- Joint swelling or tenderness

### Tests Used to Diagnose Osteoarthritis

Osteoarthritis is usually diagnosed after your health care provider has taken a careful history of your symptoms and performs a thorough physical examination. There are no definitive laboratory tests to make an absolute diagnosis of osteoarthritis. Tests may include: a clinical history, a physical exam, xrays, and joint aspiration. Blood tests may be performed to rule out other forms of arthritis.

### Treatment of Osteoarthritis

Non-surgical treatments of osteoarthritis include medications, nutritional supplementation, physical therapy, occupational therapy, exercise, and weight loss.

Surgical interventions may include arthroscopy, osteotomy, total joint replacement, or fusion. Surgery is not the first line of treatment for osteoarthritis and is reserved for those with severe pain, marked joint instability or the inability to perform activities of daily living.

#### Medications

The most common medications used for osteoarthritis are nonsteroidal, anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs). These include aspirin, ibuprofen and naproxen. Other medications include Cox-2 inhibitors, steroids and over the counter supplements.

For a comprehensive list of medications used in the treatment of osteoarthritis, please access the following link: [www.ehealthmd.com/library/osteoarthritis/OSA\\_treatment.html#med](http://www.ehealthmd.com/library/osteoarthritis/OSA_treatment.html#med)

**References:**

1. Health Information Publications. [www.ehealthmd.com/library/osteoarthritis/OSA\\_what.html](http://www.ehealthmd.com/library/osteoarthritis/OSA_what.html) ; accessed December 4, 2006.
2. University of Maryland Medical Center. Osteoarthritis: Ways to Cope with a Common Disability. [http://www.umm.edu/features/osteo\\_coping.html](http://www.umm.edu/features/osteo_coping.html) ; accessed December 4, 2006.
3. Brigham and Women's Hospital. Osteoarthritis: Your Questions Answered. Page last modified on August 29, 2006. <http://www.brighamandwomens.org/patient/osteoarthritis.aspx>; accessed December 4, 2006.

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