

# OSTEOARTHRITIS

## What is Osteoarthritis?

Osteoarthritis (OA) is the most common form of arthritis. Known as the “wear and tear” type of arthritis, OA is chronic, degenerative condition characterized by the breakdown of the joint’s cartilage. Articular cartilage is the part of the joint that cushions the ends of bones and allows for easy joint movement. It differs from the two C shaped shock absorbers known as “menisci”. The breakdown of cartilage causes “bone-on-bone” rubbing, resulting in stiffness, pain, and loss of motion in the joint. Osteoarthritis is also known as degenerative joint disease. OA of the knee and hip is the most common cause of arthritis related disability in the U.S. It most commonly affects middle-aged and older people, with most people developing it after age 45. The cause of OA is not completely understood and there is no cure. Many factors play a role in whether or not you get OA, including age, obesity, injury or overuse and genetics.

There are several stages of osteoarthritis:

1. Cartilage loses its elasticity and becomes vulnerable to damage.
2. Wearing away of the cartilage causes change to the underlying bone, resulting in bony growths called spurs, that develop at the joint.
3. Bits of bone or cartilage float freely in the joint “loose bodies” (“joint mice”).
4. The joint lining, or synovium, becomes inflamed due to cartilage breakdown.

Changes in the cartilage and bones of the joint lead to pain, swelling, and reduced function. OA most commonly occurs in the weight bearing joints of the hips, knees and lower back.

If you suspect that you have arthritis, it is important to get a correct diagnosis and begin early treatment. There are other conditions, such as rheumatoid arthritis, that have different treatment plans. It is important that you are being treated properly for your form of arthritis.

## What are the symptoms of arthritis?

Most often OA develops gradually. It may start as joint soreness or stiffness. Some people’s OA may never get worse than that. Others may see their OA progress to a point where the pain is unbearable, and they have difficulty walking and sleeping. The most common signs and symptoms of OA are:

1. Joint soreness.
2. Stiffness after periods of rest.
3. Morning stiffness, which does not last very long.
4. Joint pain that is worse in the evening after a day of activity.
5. Loss of coordination and posture due to pain and stiffness.
6. Development over time of a “boed” or “knock knee” limb alignment
7. Joint swelling, particularly after activities

