

Health Notes

Osteoarthritis

by Dr. Mark Craft,
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Arthritis is a very common ailment. It can range in severity from a little stiffness to being totally disabling. As common as it is, very few truly understand it.

The most common form of arthritis is OSTEO-ARTHRITIS, referred to as OA in clinical settings. It is thought of as a "wear and tear" disease, "aging or stress" arthritis, because it is a degenerative disorder of the articular cartilage of movable joints.

OA is a non-inflammatory progressive disorder. It rarely occurs before forty years of age, is present to some degree in most people after fifty years of age, and very common after sixty. OA causes early morning stiffness that improves within thirty minutes of activity. This differs from Rheumatoid arthritis, which can take one hour or more to improve.

OA takes a long time to develop. Injury, in the form of acute injuries not properly treated, long-term repetitive injuries, or the stress of weight-bearing activities, begin the pathologic degenerative changes characteristic of OA in the joint cartilage.

In the early developmental stages of OA, the articular cartilage of the joint surfaces begins to soften. When this happens, the cartilage breaks down, and the joint space begins to narrow. The impact of motion and weight-bearing increases, causing the bony surfaces of the joint now exposed from the breakdown of the protective cartilage to erupt.

The body will produce a proliferation of bone activity in the joint surfaces, resulting in a roughened surface with characteristic spurring (osteophytes) and joint space narrowing.

OA characteristically involves the weight-bearing joints of the body, namely the spine, hip, knee, and ankle. Joints easily traumatized, such as the shoulder, elbow, wrist, and hand are also sites of OA. One or several joints are usually involved.

The degeneration of this form of arthritis is not always bilateral and symmetrical, meaning it can affect only one side of the body. The thinning of joint spaces is always non-uniform, which points to the gradual degeneration and destruction of the articular cartilage. As the joint surfaces continue to break down, the joint alignment becomes altered.

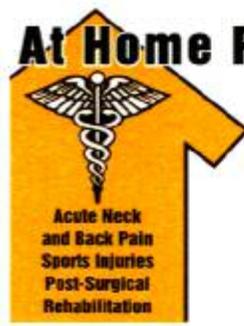
At this point, the function of the joint is greatly affected.

Chiropractors treat OA with specific spinal manipulation, tractioning techniques, and adjunctive therapies similar to physical therapy, as well as specialized nutritional support. Changes in lifestyles and altering activities of daily living are often helpful.

The Medical Profession may prescribe certain medications to ease the symptoms of OA, or refer a patient to physical therapy. Orthopedics, at times, utilizes different injections for helping joint function. Patients who have received a synthetic injection in their osteoarthritic knees have received relief, and have delayed total joint replacements.

If you suffer from osteoarthritis, there are different treatment options available that you can pursue. Don't wait... this condition is progressive and will surely worsen without intervention.





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