

Colorado Gerontological Society

Arthritis—whether it's osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, or gout—is probably the most common disease for seniors. Some kinds of arthritis are marked by intense pain and swelling lasting only a short time. The more common types of arthritis may cause less pain while still damaging joints.

Osteoarthritis

Osteoarthritis occurs when the cartilage that pads the bones in a joint wears away and the bones rub against each other, causing discomfort or pain. Osteoarthritis most often strikes hands, neck, lower back and weight-bearing joints such as knees and hips.

Rheumatoid arthritis

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is an autoimmune disease, and can be very debilitating. Rheumatoid arthritis causes pain, swelling and stiffness that lasts for hours, and often happens in the same joint on both sides of the body. RA can also cause problems with the heart, muscles, blood vessels, nervous system and eyes. Rheumatoid arthritis is more common in women.



Gout

Gout, the “disease of kings,” is probably the most painful arthritis. Gout typically strikes the big toe, but other joints can be affected. Swelling causes the skin around the joint to pull tightly, making the area red and painfully tender. Eating certain rich foods like liver, dried beans, peas, anchovies and gravy, drinking alcohol, and being overweight can cause gout.

Risk Factors

- Age
- Joint injuries
- More frequent in females
- Infections in the joints
- Genetics
- Occupations that cause repetitive movements
- Weight (overweight and obesity)



Prevention

Arthritis is a serious health condition, but can be treated or possibly prevented. Many of the habits that are recommended for a healthy lifestyle play a role in preventing some types of arthritis and related conditions. Some common tips from the American Academy for Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation for prevention include:

- Doing isometric (non-movement) exercises to strengthen muscles around the joints to prevent wear and tear.
- Stretching exercises to maintain flexibility and range of motion.
- Maintaining appropriate weight for one's height

Screening Tools

The Arthritis Foundation has developed a risk assessment for osteoarthritis which can be found at www.fightarthritis.org. The tool focuses on pain in joints and limitations on activities. The tool helps individuals to develop a plan for exercise, healthy eating habits, daily activities, and weight management.

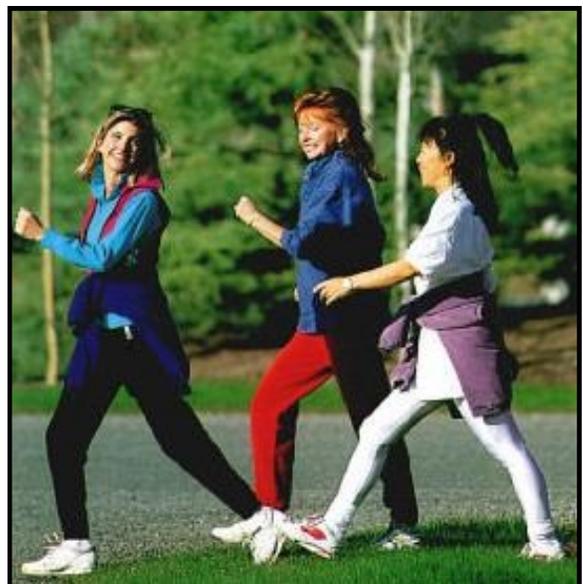
Diagnosis

Arthritis can be diagnosed with physical examination of joints and muscles, based on the description of the pain. To confirm a diagnosis, determine the benefits of a specific treatment regimen, review the side effects of medications, blood tests may be ordered. Medicare will pay for the examination and the blood tests .

Treatment & Management

To reduce the effects of arthritis:

- Balance activity with individualized rest.
- Exercise joints.
- Eat a balanced diet.
- Protect joints by avoiding activities that might cause stress to an affected joint.
- Use proper methods for bending, lifting, reaching, sitting and standing.
- Use the largest and strongest joints and muscles as much as possible.
- Avoid staying in one position for a long time.
- Simplify work routines.
- Avoid stressing “vulnerable joints” by asking for help.
- Use braces, canes and crutches that are properly fitted to reduce pain.
- Medicines can help with pain and swelling:
- Acetaminophen (Tylenol—best for pain relief, not reduction in swelling),
- Over-the-counter NSAIDs (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) include ibuprofen (Advil), naproxen (Aleve)
- Ketoprofen and certain other prescription medicines can ease pain and reduce swelling
- Before taking any medications or herbals check in with your pharmacist for potential side effects.



Questions For Your Doctor

- Does my arthritis only affect the joints or are there other areas of my body that can be involved? Can my eyes, heart, lungs, brain, or kidneys be affected? How?
- While I take the medications that you recommend, what are the procedures for monitoring possible side effects (for example, high blood pressure)?
- Are you aware of the other medications that I am taking and how they will interact with the arthritis medications?

TIPS

- ⇒ When arthritis makes normal tasks difficult, there are shoes, canes, kitchen gadgets and household aids to help manage daily life. “Doing It Easier” is a program of the Arthritis Foundation with suggestions on how to cope with everyday activities of daily living. Local retail stores may sell these aids. AbleData has an online list of more than 40,000 aids to help with activities of daily living including the manufacturer, descriptions of the product, and costs.
- ⇒ The Arthritis Foundation offers a Drug Guide, a description of the common drugs to treat arthritis, the drug interactions, and the side effects. They also offer guidance on the use of vitamins and minerals.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

AbleData - www.abledata.com or call 1-800-227-0216

American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation - www.aapmr.org or call 1-847-737-6000

Arthritis Foundation - www.arthritis.org or call 1-800-475-6447

