

# THE FACTS ABOUT ARTHRITIS



**The term arthritis literally means “inflammation of a joint.”** Joints are places where two bones meet, such as the knee and elbow. Arthritis encompasses more than 100 painful diseases and conditions that affect joints and their surrounding tissues and muscle.

People suffering from arthritis generally experience pain, stiffness, and swelling in and around their joints. Arthritic joints may be difficult to bend or straighten, and pain is often worse in the morning and after periods of inactivity.

## Types of Arthritis

The most common type of arthritis is osteoarthritis, which occurs when cartilage — the cushioning tissue between bones — wears away, causing the bones to rub against each other whenever joints move. Such wear-and-tear can occur as a result of aging, constant use, or injury. Osteoarthritis is usually found in weight-bearing joints such as the hip, knee, and ankle.

Other types of arthritis include rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, fibromyalgia, and gout. In rheumatoid arthritis, the body’s immune system produces chemicals that attack the body. Joint linings swell and affect surrounding tissue as the chemicals attack and destroy joint surfaces. Left untreated, rheumatoid arthritis can become a chronic, disabling condition.

## How is Arthritis Diagnosed?

Your doctor will diagnose arthritis through a physical examination and a careful evaluation of your symptoms. He or she may use X-rays to determine the extent of joint deterioration, as well as blood tests and other laboratory tests to determine the type of arthritis.

## Facts About Arthritis

- Arthritis is the nation’s number-one cause of disability, affecting 1 in 5 Americans — more than 50 million people.
- More than half of arthritis sufferers are under age 65, and the number of cases is set to rise dramatically as the population ages.
- The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that arthritis will affect 67 million people by 2030, and that more than a third will experience limited activity.
- Arthritis mostly affects adults, but children can have it, too.

## How is Arthritis Treated?

While there is no cure for arthritis, a number of treatment options are available to help relieve joint pain and improve mobility.

- + **Medication.** Over-the-counter anti-inflammatory medications such as aspirin, ibuprofen, naproxen, and acetaminophen help control pain and other symptoms. Prescription medications are also available depending on the type of arthritis and its severity.
- + **Lifestyle changes.** Your doctor may recommend changes to your lifestyle or activities to help you avoid aggravating arthritis pain. For example, you may need to make changes at work and replace high-impact activities such as jogging, aerobics, and certain sports with low-impact activities such as walking, swimming, and cycling.
- + **Therapy and exercise.** People with arthritis often benefit from physical therapy and exercise to reduce stiffness, increase range of motion, and strengthen muscle, bone, and cartilage. In addition to reducing pain and improving physical function, exercise promotes weight loss, which can relieve stress and strain from arthritic joints.

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## How is Arthritis Treated? *(cont.)*

+ **Surgery.** Orthopedic surgery is an option when medications fail to relieve pain and other symptoms. Common procedures include:

- Arthroscopy (removes parts of the damaged joint lining)
- Osteotomy (realigns the affected joints)
- Joint fusion (fuses the two bones of the joint together to prevent motion and relieve pain)
- Total joint replacement