

OSTEOARTHRITIS



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What is osteoarthritis? Osteoarthritis is a form of arthritis as a result of loss of cartilage of one or more joints. The cartilage acts as a cushion between the bones of the joints. The loss of cartilage causes the bones to rub together and hence produces symptoms. Osteoarthritis mostly affects the joints of the knees, feet, hands and spine.

Statistics: Globally, about 350 million people have arthritis and about 40 million are affected in the United States.

Etiology & risk factors: The causes and risk factors of osteoarthritis include age (older age group), genetics, sports injuries, repetitive straining of joints, overweight, gender (women are more prone to osteoarthritis) and some bleeding disorders such as hemophilia.

What are the signs and symptoms? The manifestations you can experience are pain during or after some movement; joint stiffness after a period of inactivity or waking up; tenderness and inflammation; feeling a grating sensation when using the affected joint; decrease in the range of motion of the affected joint; and you may feel some hard lumps (bony spurs) around the joint. There are two types of nodes associated with this condition - Heberden's nodes and Bouchard's nodes. The nodes that are close to the fingernail are referred as Heberden's nodes whereas nodes in the middle joint of the finger are referred as Bouchard's nodes.

How is osteoarthritis diagnosed? The diagnosis of osteoarthritis is done by performing X-rays and physical examination of the affected joint. There are no specific blood tests required. There will be certain situations

when the doctor may need to perform a joint synovial analysis which is done by drawing fluid out of the affected joint.

What is the treatment? The conservative treatments include bed rest, reducing weight if required, exercise, physical and occupational therapy and medications. Medications such as acetaminophen and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) relieve mild pain. Other conservative treatments include applying local heat or cold packs on the affected joint and using support devices such as braces, splints and canes. Food supplements such as glucosamine may relieve some pain and fish oil supplements may reduce inflammation. In cases where conservative treatment is not responding, injecting hyaluronic acid into the joint can be useful. Surgery is reserved for severe cases and also for cases that do not respond to any conservative treatment. Some surgical interventions include realigning the bones; joint replacement (arthroplasty); fusion of joints (arthrodesis); and total knee and hip replacement. Foods that can help to relieve the symptoms of osteoarthritis include fish, dairy products, broccoli, green vegetables, nuts, garlic and green tea. Foods to avoid in this health condition are processed sugar, refined carbohydrates and saturated fat.

Are there any prevention methods? There is no specific preventive method except to avoid joint injury.

Are there any complications associated with it? Some complications include: not able to perform specific tasks; bleeding or infection in the joint; bone death; and rupture of tendons or ligaments.

If you have osteoarthritis with mild symptoms, medications will help to ease the pain. In severe cases, you may need to consult your healthcare provider about interventions such as injections or surgeries.

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