

Suffering from Osteoarthritis?

Nearly 21 million Americans are currently affected by osteoarthritis (OA) and most people over age 60 have some degree of OA. Odds are you may be dealing with the aches and pains from OA and wishing you could do something about it. Or maybe you're not sure what is causing the discomfort or pain, but think it's probably "just arthritis". The chance of developing some form of OA increases with age and in people over age 50, the incidence is higher in women. OA can occur in just about any joint in the body. The most common joints affected are weight-bearing joints such as the spine, hips, and knees. This article will focus on the definition, causes, symptoms, and treatments for osteoarthritis.

"Arthritis" is a general term that means "inflammation" in the joint. More specifically "Osteoarthritis" is the breakdown of cartilage in the joint. This cartilage breaks down because it becomes stiff which makes it more susceptible to damage from normal joint movement. Eventually the cartilage is damaged to the point that one or both bones that make up the joint are rubbing against each other. This cartilage breaks down and bone on bone activity causes the pain associated with OA. Osteoarthritis can also be called "Degenerative joint disease", so if you hear this phrase don't be alarmed it's just another way to say it.

Causes of OA can be divided into 2 categories: Genetic or Non-genetic. Genetic factors include: Sex (females > males) and inherited disorders. Non-genetic factors for OA include: Age, overweight, post-menopausal females, developmental bone/joint disease, trauma, environment, and previous surgery. The most common causes are: sex, age, weight, environment, & trauma. Age is the strongest risk factor for OA. Being overweight puts increased stress on joints which causes increased rate of breakdown to joint cartilage. Environmental causes involve jobs, hobbies, or participating in sports that involve kneeling, squatting, stair climbing, and/or heavy repetitive joint use. Environmental examples include: farming, factory work, typing/computers, construction, and watermen.

Treatment and management for OA concentrates on controlling the symptoms as there is no way to control the process. A top ten list of points to address for treating OA include:

1. Education
2. Physical Therapy (M.D. referral needed)
3. Weight reduction
4. Drugs (NSAIDS should be discussed with your physician prior to taking)
5. Creams (NSAIDS or capsaicin, but limited supportive evidence)
6. Corticosteroid injections into the joint (performed by M.D., and success varies person to person)
7. Weekly Hyaluronic acid injections (3-5 weeks)
8. "Pain killers" (prescribed by M.D., side effects include addiction and abuse)
9. Arthroscopic surgery (debridement if needed and flushing out with saline solution)

10. Total joint replacement (most invasive, but highly successful with post-op physical therapy).

Treatment and management for OA will vary depending on your goals and lifestyle. Please consult your physician to decide the best course of action. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions about osteoarthritis or any other aches and pains that may affect you on a daily basis. Tidewater physical therapy's hours of operation are M-F 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

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