

### **Will OA affect my family?**

It is not catching and cannot be given to family and friends.

### **Does the weather affect osteoarthritis?**

Painful joints are often sensitive to the weather. They tend to feel worse during the cold autumnal and winter months.

### **Keeping your spirits up.**

Depression, low motivation and lack of sleep can all make pain worse. They can all influence how you perceive pain and lower your threshold to pain.



A positive and hopeful approach is key.

Take up hobbies, socialise, exercise and sleep well.

If you are feeling low in mood, depressed or having problems sleeping, contact your GP for advice.



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## **Osteoarthritis**

### **What can I do to help myself?**



Although there is no cure for osteoarthritis there are many ways in which you can relieve your symptoms and reduce the likelihood of things progressing.

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## The self help guide.....

### Reduce stress on joints

This can be done in a variety of ways.....

- ◇ **Keep to your ideal weight.** If you are overweight, by losing just a few pounds you will notice a big difference. This can be difficult and you need to be determined. Combining exercise and a healthy diet is the key.
- ◇ **Pacing.** Spread physically hard jobs out throughout the day, rather than tackling them all at once and increasing pain and discomfort.
- ◇ **Wear shoes with thick soles that are supportive.** They act as shock absorbers for your feet, knees, hips, and back. For women it is important to wear flat shoes, as the heel can put excess strain on the joints.
- ◇ **Use a walking stick.** To reduce the weight and stress on a painful joint. A therapist/doctor can advise you on this.
- ◇ **Protect your joints.** Avoid unnecessary activities that put a lot of strain on your joints. Think of modifying your home, car, workplace to minimize unnecessary stress.

### Activity and exercise

You need to keep your joints moving!

Strengthening exercises: this will improve the strength and tone of your muscles that act over your osteoarthritic joint. This helps stabilise and protect, and helps reduce the pain.



Aerobic exercise is the second form of exercise you should do. Any exercise that increases your pulse rate and makes you breathless. This can also help reduce your pain. Regular aerobic exercise can encourage a better nights sleep and is very good for your general health,.

A physiotherapist will teach you the correct exercises, but then it is up to you to continue them as part of your daily routine.

### Will tablets and cream help?

Painkillers can often help symptoms and make it easier to move about. They DO NOT affect the arthritis itself.

Speak to your GP regarding pain relief, and they will recommend and prescribe you something if appropriate.

Inflammation in the joint may contribute to pain and stiffness, so your doctor may prescribe a course of Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDS).

NSAIDS creams and gels often help.

Capsaicin cream (made from the pepper plant) is also an effective and safe painkiller.

Many people try glucosamine and chondroitin tablets that they buy themselves from health and food shops. The reason behind their use is that joint cartilage normally contains glucosamine and chondroitin compounds and taking supplements of these natural ingredients may help improve the health of the damaged cartilage. Current research is trying to establish if this is true.

### How can severe osteoarthritis be treated?

A steroid injection into the joint may successfully improve pain for several weeks, especially in the knee or the thumb.

This is mainly reserved for very painful arthritic joints.

Surgery can be successful in the few cases where severe pain has developed and caused mobility to be limited in spite of other treatment. Hip and Knee replacements are the most common types of joint replacements,.

### ???.YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED.???

#### Can any special diet help?

A large amount of research is being done on diet, nutrition and the effects on osteoarthritis. It is yet to be proven, however glucosamine supplements can produce some improvements in osteoarthritis. In relation to diet in general, there is strong evidence to suggest being overweight increases the risk of developing arthritis and increases the risk of it progressing.

#### Will rest or exercise help?

In general, it is better to use them than not to! You must strike a sensible balance between both. The best advice is 'little and often'.

#### Can swimming help?

**Yes!** Water supports the body's weight so that little force goes through the joints as you exercise. Warm water can really help - so having a hot bath in the morning can help relieve morning stiffness.