



What is Osteoarthritis?

More often called just “arthritis”, this is a degenerative joint disease which is like joint failure. It affects hyaline cartilage (the cartilage on the ends of your bones), subchondral bone (the bone under the cartilage) and quite often all of the tissues around the joint.

Can it be anywhere on the body?

Potentially yes, but the most common areas are the fingers, toes, hips and knees. You can also have arthritis in your spine or other joints.

Can it be cured?

It can be managed by changing diet and lifestyle so that it isn't noticeable or a problem, although in very serious cases some distortion of the joint may make recovery difficult.

Who gets it and when?

It affects men and women equally, and usually in older age. However it is possible for younger people to get arthritis. This can be due to genetic or metabolic conditions. Other causes are trauma (accident, fractures), congenital joint abnormalities, inflammation, obesity (too much weight on the joints wears them out), rheumatoid arthritis, gout, diabetes and more. It can come from overuse due to excessive movement required by typing, athletics or other occupations. If you have a highly stressful lifestyle, your system is naturally acidic and inflammatory, and this can also contribute to onset of arthritis.



How do you know you've got it?

An X-ray can show degeneration in the joints, but you will probably know before that because of the pain, inflammation and reduced range of movement. It can start with aching joints which are made worse by exercise or movement. It usually progresses to morning stiffness which is relieved by exercise.

Older people often develop Heberden's Nodes, which are permanent swellings around the last joint of the fingers. You may also hear grating and odd sensations in the joints.

What do doctors do for arthritis?

They usually prescribe NSAIDS or non-steroidal anti-inflammatories. These may work, but they can also damage your digestive system by flattening the villi in the small intestine so that you don't absorb your nutrients as well. You also need to discuss possible side-effects with your doctor. Common NSAIDS include aspirin, paracetamol and ibuprofen. They may also use corticosteroids which may help in the beginning but simply mask the problem and can cause massive bone loss later in life if prolonged.



What does a naturopath do that's different?

We use food, herbs and supplements to reduce the inflammation, slow the rate of deterioration, stabilise and maintain the joint cartilage. We also suggest lifestyle changes which will improve or stabilise the arthritis.

Do I have to avoid tomatoes and potatoes?

Some people may be sensitive to the solanine which is in foods of this family (also capsicum, peppers, eggplant) and it may affect their arthritis. Others may be unaffected. You need to eliminate these foods from your diet completely for up to two weeks, then challenge by introducing one and seeing if your arthritis gets worse. Keep a diary so that you know what you're doing.



If it hurts, do I stop exercising?

Absolutely not. Use it or lose it. You need gentle and fairly passive exercise when the inflammation is at its worst. When you get improvement, you can be more active. But avoiding exercise is the worst thing you can do. Be sensible. You need to avoid any really strenuous sports as the joints can be traumatised, worsening the situation. Yoga and Pilates are great to lubricate the joints.



What about diet?

We can do a lot with diet, particularly plant foods. If you're a big meat eater, you may not like this so much, but think of the benefits.

Foods to avoid are:

- * sugar and all sugar products, cakes, biscuits, ice creams, sweets, lollies etc.
- * red meat and animal fats
- * full fat dairy foods
- * processed and fatty foods
- * white flour (or any grain) products
- * coffee, black tea and alcohol
- * any foods to which you might have a sensitivity or allergy

There are sugar-free and vegetarian diet sheets on this website as well.

Foods to include are:

- * fruit and veg, such as avocado, bananas, berries, dates, figs, beans, cabbage, carrots, lettuce, cucumber, pumpkin, parsley, currants, peaches, apricots and grapes. Pineapples and pawpaws have bromelain which is a great digestive enzyme. The sulphur containing veg - asparagus, broccoli, garlic and onions - are really good for arthritis
- * oily fish 2-3 times per week, plus fish oil and linseed/flaxseed supplements
- * eggs contain sulphur which is good too
- * plant proteins – combine nuts and seeds, grains and pulses
- * brown rice, quinoa, buckwheat and millet
- * fresh vegetable juices such as beetroot, cucumber and grape, or apple and carrot
- * green tea and juices such as carrot and celery

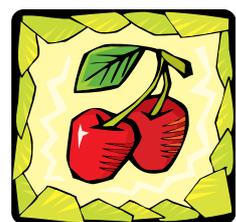


Why do you keep mentioning sulphur?

Sulphates are required to manufacture healthy cartilage. Glucosamine sulphate and Chondroitin sulphate are well-known joint repair formulae, but you can get sulphur from many foods, as mentioned above.

What about water?

Definitely have good hydration. It helps lubricate the joints and assists the maintenance of the cartilage.



What supplements might be good?

We've already mentioned glucosamine and chondroitin. Others include:

- * fish oils, because they lower inflammation and pain long-term
- * vitamins A, B3, B5, C and E
- * Selenium and antioxidants in general to combat inflammation damage
- * Zinc and copper help collagen synthesis and aid the maintenance of joint cartilage

It is best to see your therapist about these and other possible solutions. Every case is different, and in self-medicating, you could be taking supplements you shouldn't have.

Do I have to try to lose weight?

This could be the best thing you ever do. Being obese or overweight puts a lot of strain on the joints, and is also inflammatory, so it can cause the pain. Being slimmer will help you exercise, improve your self-esteem and your overall health, vitality and longevity.



Anything else?

If you have severe arthritis, you may need to look at having your home modified or buying appliances which cause the least stress on your joints. Hot baths may reduce joint stiffness. A physiotherapist may give you useful exercises. Also look at having good quality orthopedic shoes made if necessary, as this may correct joint instability from fallen arches. Some people wear copper bracelets, but there is little or no scientific evidence these work. Any positive effect may be from dermal absorption of copper which produces copper-zinc superoxide dismutase, a useful enzyme.