

Are your joints aching all the time?

You might be experiencing a form of arthritis. There are over 100 different types of this joint disorder, but osteoarthritis is the most common type of arthritis most people experience. It affects about 37 million people in the United States and usually starts in middle age.

Osteoarthritis occurs equally among the sexes before age 55 and after age 55, it occurs more often in the women. Research suggests that approximately a third with osteoarthritis will experience disability later in life so being active is important along with managing the disease.

Osteoarthritis is a degenerative joint disease that affects one or more joints resulting with limited range of motion due to excessive wear and tear on the cartilage. Continuing with range of motion is very important because osteoarthritis can become worse over time. You may first notice pain, stiffness or tenderness in your joints with inactivity or when the joint has been over used. You might even feel or hear grating of bones along with noticing some swelling. If you have experienced these symptoms for more than a couple of weeks, consider seeing your physician.

Many causes exist that can contribute to the development of osteoarthritis. For one remember that it occurs more in women than men after age 55, so age is a factor. It also can be a result from a former injury you may have acquired. Other factors that don't help the joint disease include obesity, autoimmune diseases or any infections. Any of these can predispose you to potential problems. Diagnosing of osteoarthritis is fairly easy. It can be done with a history & physical, blood tests, x rays and even fluid extraction of a joint.

There are a few treatments that can be done for osteoarthritis. First you can try over the counter pain management with Tylenol or nonsteroidal anti-inflammatories such as Aleve, Motrin or Ibuprofen to name a few or pain crèmes that contain aspirin compounds. If your pain is still not managed your physician can evaluate your condition and prescribe a stronger medication. (Remember before you start taking any medication you need to be evaluated by your physician.) If medication options aren't working for you then other possibilities are joint replacement, fusion of the joint or an arthroscopy where a specialist uses a tiny camera to visualize the joint, then

cleans around the cartilage and makes repairs as needed. Other treatments mentioned in my research was the use of a TENS unit (transcutaneous nerve stimulation.) by a therapist or injection of artificial joint fluid, such as Synvisc or Hyalgan, directly into the joint by a specialist. This option may provide relief up to 6 months.

Other complementary or alternative treatments mentioned in treating osteoarthritis are enrolling in a Tai chi or yoga classes. This can keep your joints limber. Acupuncture is also mentioned because it is believed that tiny needles inserted into the body at precise points can redirect the body's energy or stop pain receptors. Also some people believe that magnets over the affected joint will relieve pain. This is seen with the use of magnetic bracelets. In some studies it was proved successful while in other studies found no benefit.

The goal of osteoarthritis is to reduce pain and improve range of motion. First of all, know your limitations and get plenty of rest. Engage in physical therapy if you need help. Make every attempt at eating a balanced diet and maintaining a healthy weight. This may mean a weight reduction for better pain management. Avoid any excess stress on your joints and if you are not experiencing tingling or numbness at the site you might use hot and cold packs to the affected area, twenty minutes on and twenty minutes off. Also use assistive devices such as a cane or walker to help relieve stress to the joints.

As always, if you have any questions or comments, please email me at gheffelmire@dearborncounty.in.gov