



Arthritis – patient information

What is arthritis?

Arthritis is a very common condition that causes pain and inflammation of the joints and bones. It affects 1 in 5 people in Australia.

Symptoms of arthritis

- Pain
- Stiffness
- Restricted movements of the joints
- Inflammation and swelling of the joints
- Warmth and redness over the skin of a joint

Types of arthritis

There are over 200 different types of diseases that can cause aches and pains in joints, bones and muscles. The two most common forms of arthritis are **Osteoarthritis** and **Rheumatoid arthritis**.

Osteoarthritis

With Osteoarthritis the connective tissues (cartilage) between the bones begin to waste away (degeneration) which leads to painful rubbing of bone on bone in the joint. It can also cause misalignment of the joints. Commonly affected joints are in the hands, spine, hips and knees. Osteoarthritis begins slowly and causes stiffness, pain and restricted movement in the affected joint. In some people it only causes only slight stiffness whilst others go on to experience cracking joints (crepitation), bone growths (most commonly on the hands) and joints that move out of their natural position. Pain and movement generally become worse throughout the day the more the joints are used. Osteoarthritis usually occurs in people over 50 years of age and the cause is not fully understood. Some factors thought to contribute towards the disease are obesity (this puts added strain on the joints), previous damage to a joint such as a previous injury, jobs or activities involving the repetitive movement of a joint.



Rheumatoid Arthritis

Rheumatoid Arthritis is a less common but more severe form of arthritis than Osteoarthritis. Rheumatoid Arthritis is an autoimmune disease meaning that the body's immune system attacks and destroys the joint/s causing pain and swelling. This can lead to a breakdown of bone and cartilage and a reduction in movement.

As with Osteoarthritis, Rheumatoid Arthritis begins gradually and the first symptoms are often felt in the small joints of the body such as the fingers and toes. The condition often progresses causing pain, swelling and stiffness in other joints. Symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis are often worse in the morning (cold and damp weather can aggravate the condition) however symptoms may improve throughout the day the more the joints are used.

Treatment

There is no known cure for arthritis but there are a number of treatments that can be used to slow down the progression of the condition.

Treatment for Osteoarthritis can involve the prescription of pain medication such as nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) and corticosteroids. Surgery may be recommended in severe cases of Osteoarthritis

Treatment for Rheumatoid Arthritis usually concentrates on slowing the progression of the condition and minimising the amount of damage to the joints. Treatment includes can include disease modifying anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARDs), physiotherapy and regular exercise.

Support services

A support group offering advice and support for people with arthritis and their families is provided by 'Arthritis Australia' (www.arthritisaustralia.com.au).