

# THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT OSTEOARTHRITIS

## What is osteoarthritis?

- A degenerative joint disease that causes cartilage to break down.
- Without cartilage, your bones start to rub together, and over time this can permanently damage the joint.
- Osteoarthritis causes pain, swelling, and reduced motion in your joints.
- It can occur in any joint but usually it affects your hands, knees, hips or spine.

## What are risk factors for osteoarthritis?

- Getting older.
- Being a woman.
- Bone deformities, such as malformed joints or defective cartilage.
- Joint injuries, such as from playing sports or from an accident.
- Being overweight, which puts added stress on your weight-bearing joints.
- Working in an occupation that places repetitive stress on a particular joint.
- Having diabetes, underactive thyroid, gout, or Paget disease of bone.

## How is it treated?

- Keep as active as you can.
- Do the exercises you and your doctor agree are right for you. Go to physical therapy if you need to.
- If you are too heavy, try to lose weight. Ask your doctor for help.
- Use canes, braces, and other aids to make it easier to get around.
- To reduce pain, your doctor may recommend pain relievers, cortisone shots, or lubrication injections.



- Surgery may be used to realign bones or to replace joints.
- Call your doctor if you have fever; red, hot, or swollen joints; more pain than usual; or falls.

## What questions should you ask your doctor?

- Which medicines are best to treat my pain?
- Are there side effects? If so, what are they?
- What do I do if my medicines stop working?
- Will shots into my joints help?
- Will I need surgery on my joints?

## For More Information

[www.arthritis.org/conditions-treatments/disease-center/osteoarthritis/](http://www.arthritis.org/conditions-treatments/disease-center/osteoarthritis/)  
[www.arthritistoday.org/what-you-can-do/staying-active/exercise-videos/](http://www.arthritistoday.org/what-you-can-do/staying-active/exercise-videos/)

Information on osteoarthritis and other resources from the Arthritis Foundation, including exercise videos.

[www.niams.nih.gov/Health\\_Info/Osteoarthritis/default.asp](http://www.niams.nih.gov/Health_Info/Osteoarthritis/default.asp)  
Handout on osteoarthritis from the National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases.

[http://nihseniorhealth.gov/osteoarthritis/treatmentandresearch/video/arth4\\_na\\_intro.html](http://nihseniorhealth.gov/osteoarthritis/treatmentandresearch/video/arth4_na_intro.html)

[http://nihseniorhealth.gov/osteoarthritis/treatmentandresearch/video/arth3\\_na\\_intro.html](http://nihseniorhealth.gov/osteoarthritis/treatmentandresearch/video/arth3_na_intro.html)

Videos on how exercises can help and on using assistive devices from NIH Senior Health.

