

Arthritis

Arthritis occurs when the joints in your body are inflamed or there is a breakdown of cartilage in your joints. Cartilage is the cushion in the joints that protects them from pressure and makes movements smooth. When cartilage breaks down in some joints, your bones rub together causing pain, swelling, and stiffness.

Most arthritis is osteoarthritis. This comes from joints wearing out over time from use. This occurs most often in the knees, hips and hands. The joints begin to ache and thicken. At times the tissues around the joint become strained and cause more pain.

There are other types of arthritis that occur mainly at a younger age. These often need special tests and treatments.

Risk Factors

- Growing older
- Injury to a joint
- Overuse of a joint

Signs

- Joint pain
- Joint is not stable or it feels like it will not support you
- Joints enlarge or swell
- Stiffness, often in the morning
- Limited use of joints
- Warmth around joints
- Redness of the skin around joints

Tests

Your doctor will talk to you about your health and look at your joints. Your doctor may order blood tests, x-rays or remove a small sample of fluid around the painful joint.

Treatment

Treatment of arthritis depends on:

- The cause
- Which joints are painful
- Amount of pain
- How the arthritis affects your daily activities
- Your age
- Your work or activity

As a part of your treatment, you may need to:

- Exercise to improve movement and joint strength.
- Use hot or cold treatments to control pain and swelling.
- Avoid positions or movements that put extra stress on your painful joints.
- Avoid staying in a position too long.
- Add grab bars in the shower, the bathtub and near the toilet.

If these changes do not help, your doctor may suggest medicine to control pain and swelling. Sometimes surgery is needed.

Call your doctor **right away** if:

- You have severe unexplained joint pain.
- The joint is very swollen.
- You suddenly have a hard time moving the joint.
- Your skin around the joint is red or hot to the touch.

Talk to your doctor or nurse if you have any questions or concerns.