



Bones, Muscles & Joints

ARTHRITIS

WHAT IS ARTHRITIS?

Arthritis is not just a single disease but a group of diseases that cause pain, inflammation and limited movement in one or more joints. There are, in fact, over 100 different types of arthritis and the kind of treatment you are offered will depend on what type of arthritis you have. There are two major categories of arthritis, INFLAMMATORY and NON-INFLAMMATORY. Both types can cause stiff, painful joints but each is quite different in terms of who gets the disease, which joints are affected, and the kinds of changes that occur in the joint.

OSTEOARTHRITIS (OA)

A non-inflammatory condition, this is by far the most common type of arthritis. It tends to occur in men and women over the age of 40, becoming more common with increasing age. It affects more than 60 million people in the U.S. and is one of the leading causes of disability in people over the age of 65. In osteoarthritis, cartilage (which acts as a natural shock absorber in the joint) begins to deteriorate. As cartilage wears thin, the surface becomes ragged and pock-marked. The underlying bone becomes hardened and sometimes cysts (fluid filled pockets) form within the bone. As the bone attempts to repair itself, bony spurs (osteophytes) may form, altering the contour of the joint. As a result you experience symptoms — pain, stiffness, loss of joint motion, cracking or crunching sounds (crepitus) with joint movement, swelling, joint deformity. Although oftentimes people with OA are told they will “just have to learn to live with it”, there are things which can be done to relieve pain and maintain or improve joint function. It is important that individuals suffering from OA learn what they can do to protect their joints because joint health - which allows you to remain active — is critical to your overall health and well-being.

RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS (RA)

This is the classic inflammatory arthritis. It differs from OA in a number of very significant ways. First, it is a systemic disease - that is, it affects the entire body and, in addition to damaging the joints, can cause problems with the lungs, skin, blood vessels, eyes, etc. Second, it typically occurs earlier in life, often between the ages of 25-50. Third, it affects multiple joints at once, usually in a symmetric pattern. Fourth, it is an autoimmune disorder—i.e., your body’s own immune system is attacking the joints, causing inflammation (warmth, swelling, tenderness) within the joint. Inflammation in turn causes pain, stiffness and, if chronic, damage to the joint and surrounding soft tissue structures. RA is only one of many different kinds of inflammatory arthritis - others include psoriatic arthritis, crystal induced arthritis (gout, pseudogout), polymyalgia rheumatica, infectious arthritis, ankylosing spondylitis.

DIAGNOSING ARTHRITIS

It is important that anyone with painful joints be evaluated and diagnosed so that treatment can be initiated early enough to prevent or retard irreversible joint damage.

Diagnosis is based on: Your symptoms (e.g., where do you hurt, when do you hurt the most, are your symptoms constant or do they come and go, are the same joints always affected or are different joints affected at different times, etc); physical examination, looking for evidence of systemic disease, joint inflammation, joint damage or restricted motion, pattern of joint involvement, etc; laboratory studies; x-rays; and, sometimes, response to treatment.

If we treat you, we help you for a day.
If we teach you, we help you for a lifetime.

OUR DEDICATED TEAM

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