



# Live well with arthritis



## What is arthritis?

Arthritis is swelling around the joints (where two bones meet in your body). There are more than 100 different types of arthritis.<sup>1</sup>

## Do I have arthritis?<sup>2</sup>

The most common signs of arthritis are stiffness and pain in the joints, mostly in the morning. The skin around the joint might even be red and warm to the touch. You might not be able to move the joint as much as you used to. If you have these symptoms, visit your doctor.

## What will the doctor do?

Your doctor will do a physical exam and ask about your medical background. Your doctor may:<sup>1</sup>

- Do a blood test to look for infection.
- Get X-rays of the joint.
- Take some of the fluid out of your joint (with a needle) to send to a lab.

## What is the treatment?

Treatment depends on the type of arthritis you have. But in general, treatment can help you manage your symptoms so you can have better quality of life.<sup>2</sup> Because arthritis can cause chronic pain, people who have it can be depressed as well. The best way to combat both of these is to take care of yourself.<sup>1</sup>

- Talk with your doctor so all areas of your health can be treated (physical, emotional and mental).
- Over-the-counter and prescription drugs can help with pain.
- Low-impact aerobic exercise, strength training and stretching can help manage the condition.
- Physical therapy may help. This includes heat or ice, splints to support the joints (for rheumatoid arthritis) and massage.

## Health tips for living with arthritis<sup>1, 3</sup>

- Sleep 8-10 hours a day. Take naps if you can too.
- Move and change your position often.
- Avoid positions that cause pain or strain.
- Find ways to make everyday actions easy (clothes with Velcro or zipper pulls, electronic can openers and toothbrushes, or safety rails for the tub and toilet).
- Lower your stress. Try yoga or tai chi, or you can meditate.
- Lose weight if you need to.
- Eat a healthy diet full of fruits and veggies, as well as omega-3 fatty acids.
- Get your vitamins and minerals. Make sure you get enough vitamin E.
- Apply capsaicin cream to painful joints.



1 U.S. National Library of Medicine website: Arthritis (accessed February 2015): [nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/arthritis.html](http://nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/arthritis.html)

2 Mayo Clinic website: Arthritis (accessed February 2015): [mayoclinic.org](http://mayoclinic.org)

3 WebMD website: Assistive Devices: Living Better With Arthritis (accessed February 2015): [webmd.com](http://webmd.com)

4 National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases website: Handout on Health: Osteoarthritis (accessed February 2015): [niams.nih.gov/Health\\_Info/Osteoarthritis/default.asp](http://niams.nih.gov/Health_Info/Osteoarthritis/default.asp)

5 National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases website: Handout on Health: Rheumatoid Arthritis (accessed February 2015): [niams.nih.gov/Health\\_Info/Rheumatic\\_Disease/default.asp](http://niams.nih.gov/Health_Info/Rheumatic_Disease/default.asp)

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## Osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis are the two most common types.

### Osteoarthritis<sup>4</sup>

This is the most common type of arthritis. It occurs mostly in older people but can occur in young people (often due to an injury). As you age, the cartilage between the bones begins to wear away. Then the bones rub on each other causing pain, swelling and loss of motion. Bits of bone can break off (bone spurs) and cause more pain and damage in the joint.

### Rheumatoid arthritis (RA)<sup>5</sup>

RA often starts in middle age but can affect people of all ages. Normally your body's immune system fights off illness. But for people with RA, the immune system attacks the membrane lining of the joints. Scientists aren't sure why this happens but they think a few things may be involved:

- Genetics. Certain genes have been linked to RA, but not everyone with the genes gets RA.
- Hormones. More women get RA than men. Birth control use and pregnancy can change how RA affects you.
- Viral or bacterial infection. Being exposed to certain things can trigger RA in people with the genes.

RA has some unique features:

- You get it in two joints, such as both hands or both knees.
- You can get it in your wrists and fingers.
- You may get a fever at times and feel very tired or ill in general.

### Are you at risk?<sup>2</sup>

Some things, called risk factors, make you more likely to have arthritis:

- Family history. Some types of arthritis run in families. If your parents or siblings have it, you might be more likely to have it too.
- Age. You're more likely to develop arthritis as you get older.
- Gender. Women are more likely to develop rheumatoid arthritis. Gout, another type, is more common in men.
- Joint injury. If you hurt one of your joints, you might get arthritis in it as you get older.
- Weight. Extra weight puts more stress on your your back, hips and knees. People who are obese are more likely to get arthritis.

### Helpful resources

Learn more or get support for living with arthritis at WebMD's Arthritis Health Center at [webmd.com](https://www.webmd.com).

Visit [anthem.com](https://www.anthem.com) for more ways to get healthy – and stay healthy.

