



Article Link: <http://www.webmd.com/osteoarthritis/guide/osteoarthritis-basics?page=2>

Osteoarthritis Guide

Arthritis: Osteoarthritis Basics

(continued)

How Is Osteoarthritis Diagnosed?

The diagnosis of osteoarthritis is based on a combination of the following factors:

- Your description of symptoms.
- The location and pattern of pain.
- Certain findings on physical examination, when necessary.

Your doctor may use [X-rays](#) to help confirm the diagnosis and make sure you don't have another type of arthritis. X-rays show how much joint damage has occurred.

Sometimes blood tests will be given to determine if you have a different type of arthritis.

If fluid has accumulated in the joints, your doctor may remove some of the fluid (called joint aspiration) for examination under a microscope to rule out other diseases.

How Is Osteoarthritis Treated?

Osteoarthritis usually is treated by physical therapy with muscle strengthening exercises, oral medications, hot and cold compresses to the painful joint, removal of joint fluid, injection of medications into the joint, use of supportive devices such as crutches or canes, and weight control. Surgery may be helpful to relieve pain when other treatment options have not been effective.

The type of treatment prescribed will depend on several factors including your age, activities and occupation, overall health, medical history, location of your osteoarthritis, and severity of the condition.

What Medications Are Used to Treat Osteoarthritis?

Medications may be prescribed to reduce pain caused by osteoarthritis. Pain-relieving medications include acetaminophen (for example, Tylenol) and anti-inflammatory drugs (often called [NSAIDs](#)), such as aspirin, ibuprofen or Celebrex. Some medications in the form of creams, rubs or sprays may be applied over the skin of affected areas to relieve pain. For some people with persistent pain despite these pills or creams, steroids can be injected directly into the joint for pain relief. These injections are typically limited since prolonged use can lead to bone and cartilage deterioration and weakness.

[Synvisc](#), [Supartz](#), [Euflexxa](#), [Orthovisc](#) and [Hyalgan](#) are medications given as a series of 3 to 5 weekly joint injections that can relieve pain in some people with osteoarthritis.

When osteoarthritis pain is severe and other treatments are not working, some doctors will give stronger pain pills, such as [narcotics](#).

Unfortunately, none of these will reverse or slow the progression of joint damage caused by osteoarthritis.

How Does Weight and Exercise Impact Osteoarthritis?

Staying at your recommended weight helps prevent osteoarthritis of the knees, reduces the stress on weight-bearing joints and reduces pain in affected joints. Once you have osteoarthritis, losing weight also can relieve the stress and pain in your knees.

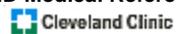
Exercise is important to improve joint movement and to strengthen the muscles that surround the joints. Gentle exercises, such as swimming or walking on flat surfaces, are recommended because they are less stressful on your joints. Avoid activities that increase joint pain, such as jogging or high impact aerobics. Exercises that strengthen the quadriceps muscle reduce knee pain in patients with osteoarthritis.

[< Previous Page](#)

1 | 2 | 3

[Next Page >](#)

WebMD Medical Reference provided in collaboration with the Cleveland Clinic



Osteoarthritis Guide

- [Overview & Facts](#)
- [Symptoms & Types](#)
- [Diagnosis & Tests](#)
- [Treatment & Care](#)
- [Living & Managing](#)
- [Support & Resources](#)

Does RA make it tough to do the things you need to do?

SPONSOR

[Consider Orenzia for Moderate to Severe RA](#)

[Satisfied with Your Health-Related Quality of Life?](#)

[Ask Your Doctor the Right Questions](#)



[Important Safety Information](#) [Prescribing Information](#)

Did this article help you? Get the latest arthritis news and treatment options with WebMD's bi-monthly arthritis newsletter.

Enter Email Address

SUBMIT