

INFORMATION

information



VICTORIA

inc. OSTEOPOROSIS VICTORIA

OSTEOARTHRITIS (OA)

What is it?

Osteoarthritis (OA) is one of the most common types of arthritis. OA affects the cartilage in the joints. Cartilage cushions the ends of bones, where the bones meet to form a joint. In O.A. this cartilage breaks down.

OA most commonly occurs in the fingers and weight bearing joints, including the knees, feet, hips and back.

Why does it occur?

Current belief is that OA is due to changes within the cells of the cartilage. This results in a loss of elasticity. Gradually the cartilage thins and may even breakdown. This leaves the ends of the bone unprotected, and the joint loses its smooth functioning.

Contrary to popular belief, vigorous use of a joint does not necessarily lead to osteoarthritis. Increasing evidence suggests the very opposite may be true.

Who does it affect?

OA most commonly develops between the ages of 45 to 90 years, however, most of us have some features with increasing age. More women than men are affected. OA may develop in joints that have been previously injured.

Outlook

The outlook for people with OA is very positive. Even in the worst cases, OA progresses slowly. For many people, OA will be mild and have little impact

For those more severe disease surgery to replace joints is often highly effective.

The Symptoms

Symptoms of OA vary. Symptoms may include the following:

- Pain and stiffness in the joint
- Swelling
- Limitation of joint movement

Diagnosis

Firstly, you will need to have a full assessment by your doctor. Your doctor may then organise further tests including:

- X-rays
- Blood tests.

Blood and joint fluid may be tested to exclude other types of arthritis.

Management

There are a variety of treatments and management techniques that help people control and reduce the effects of OA. An individual management plan should be discussed between you and your GP and other health professionals. It may include a combination of:

- Exercise
- Education
- Medication and topical creams
- Joint protection
- Healthy weight maintenance
- Support with emotional issues
- Physiotherapy treatments
- acupuncture

Surgery can be extremely effective for people with advanced OA.

Education

A better understanding of OA will greatly assist you in making decisions about the management of your condition. Arthritis Victoria's education programs can assist you to develop the skills and knowledge needed to make these decisions.

They also provide opportunities to meet others in similar situations. Arthritis Victoria can also put you in touch with local support groups, other relevant organizations and appropriate exercise groups for your condition.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Resource Centre

- Lane, Nancy E and Wallace, Daniel J (2002), *All about osteoarthritis: The definitive resource for arthritis patients and their families*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne.
- *The Arthritis Foundations guide to good living with osteoarthritis* (2000), Arthritis Foundation of America, Atlanta, GA.
- *The Columbia Presbyterian osteoarthritis handbook: The complete guide to the most common form of arthritis* (1996), Macmillan, New York.

All listed books are available on loan from the Arthritis Victoria Resource Centre to members. If you would like to find out more about becoming a member, call (03) 8531 8000.

Websites

- Arthritis Victoria
www.arthritisvic.org.au
- Arthritis Research Campaign - UK
www.arc.org.uk
- American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons
www.aaos.org
- Better Health Channel
www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Cochrane Reviews of Arthritis Treatments

- Does an osteotomy for osteoarthritis of the knee help and is it safe?
- Does exercise help osteoarthritis of the hip or knee?
- Does glucosamine work for treating osteoarthritis?
- Does low level laser therapy work for treating osteoarthritis?
- Does ultrasound therapy work to treat osteoarthritis?
- How well does paracetamol work and compare to anti-inflammatories to treat osteoarthritis and is it safe?
- How well does thermotherapy work for treating osteoarthritis of the knee and how safe is it?

If you would like one of the above Cochrane Reviews, call Arthritis Victoria, or visit our website www.arthritisvic.org.au

Support/Self Help Groups

For information about the support group nearest you, phone our Community Development Co-ordinator on (03) 8531 8000.

ARTHRITIS VICTORIA

If you would like further information please contact our telephone information service on **(03) 8531 8000** or **1800 011 041** (country callers)



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Prepared by Education & Services staff, Arthritis Victoria, revised 2006. This material is for your information and is not intended to be medical advice. You are encouraged to review the information provided with your doctor or relevant health professional.