

Contact: hhs@usc.edu
(800) 283-0676

Tip Sheet: Arthritis

What's the problem?

Arthritis includes more than 100 diseases and conditions that affect joints, the tissues that surround the joint, and other connective tissue. Each type of arthritis has a different set of unique signs and symptoms. However, nearly all types of arthritis are marked by these main signs:

- Joint pain
- Joint stiffness
- Swollen joints
- Tenderness to touch around affected joints
- Loss of flexibility and range of motion

Symptoms may come and go. They can be mild, moderate or severe. They may stay about the same for years but may progress or get worse over time. Severe arthritis can result in chronic pain, inability to do daily activities or work.

Joint injuries from sports and work can eventually lead to the most common type of arthritis — osteoarthritis (OA). It is sometimes called degenerative joint disease or “wear and tear” arthritis. It most frequently occurs in the hands, hips, and knees. It affects over 30 million US adults. OA can cause pain, stiffness, and swelling, and can result in disability.

When the lower body joints are affected by OA, everyday activities such as walking, climbing stairs and lifting objects may become difficult. When finger and hand joints are affected, OA can make it difficult to grasp and hold objects, such as a pen or a cup. It can also make it difficult to text or type.

Other common forms of arthritis include rheumatoid arthritis, fibromyalgia, gout and lupus.

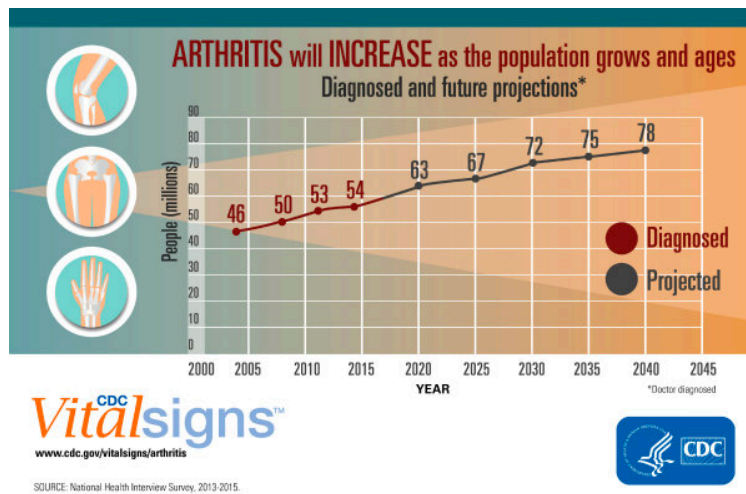
Who does it affect?

By conservative estimates, more than 54 million adults have doctor-diagnosed arthritis. People of all ages (including children), sexes and races can and do have arthritis and it is a major cause of work-related disability in America. Arthritis affects more than just older adults. Nearly 2/3 of people with arthritis are working aged adults (18-64). Additionally, specific genes are associated with a higher risk of certain types of arthritis, such as rheumatoid arthritis (RA), systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE), and ankylosing spondylitis.

Arthritis is more common in women (26 percent) than in men (18 percent). In some types, such as rheumatoid arthritis or lupus, women far outnumber men.

Arthritis prevalence increases with age. With the aging of the US population, the prevalence of arthritis is expected to increase in the coming decades. By the year 2040, over 78 million (25.9% of the projected total adult population) adults will have arthritis. This is more than 25% of the projected adult population in 2040.

Arthritis often occurs with other chronic conditions (half of those with diabetes or with heart disease, a third of those with obesity) and can interfere with their management because of reduced physical activity associated with arthritis.



Managing Arthritis

People with arthritis need to take care of their own health and wellbeing. Taking control of arthritis or other chronic disease takes effort. The day-to-day things done to manage health conditions and stay healthy are “self-management” strategies and activities. Learning to manage arthritis can help people feel in control of their health, manage pain and other symptoms, carry out daily activities, reduce stress, improve mood and communicate better with health care providers about their care.

Being active is a simple and effective way to relieve pain from arthritis. It can improve quality of life as well as reduce risk of developing other diseases, such as heart disease or diabetes. Additionally, losing weight and/or staying at a healthy weight is of particular importance. Losing as little as 10 to 12 pounds, for those who are overweight or obese, can improve pain and function for people with arthritis. A physical activity like walking or swimming, combined with dietary changes, can help one lose weight, restore function, and reduce arthritis pain.

Activities that are low impact and easy on the joints like walking, gardening or swimming have a low risk of injury and do not put too much stress on the joints. It is important to stay as active as one’s health allows and change activity level depending on arthritis symptoms. Although 150 minutes per week are recommended, any physical activity is better than none. A few minutes of exercise daily or simple workout routines can help ease pain. Additionally, maintaining a healthy

weight by engaging in physical activity can decrease pain, improve function and delay disability. Being overweight or obese puts pressure on weight-bearing joints, especially the hips, knees and spine.

In some cases, prescription medication may be suggested to treat the symptoms of arthritis. Painkillers, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs and corticosteroids are sometimes prescribed to relieve symptoms. Those experiencing symptoms of arthritis, should talk to a doctor. Arthritis symptoms should not be ignored, because early diagnosis will help prevent unnecessary damage and can result in therapies and treatments to slow the disease's progression.

Arthritis costs at least \$140 billion in direct medical costs annually. Many adults with arthritis are prescribed opioid medicines, yet other options for pain are safer. Physical activity is one of those options and can decrease pain and improve physical function by about 40% and may reduce healthcare costs. Still, 1 in 3 adults with arthritis are inactive. Adults with arthritis also can reduce their symptoms by participating in lifestyle management programs for arthritis. Only 1 in 10 have taken part in these proven, community-based programs. Adults with arthritis are significantly more likely to attend an education program when recommended by a provider.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends various intervention programs focusing on physical activity and lifestyle management programs for arthritis that can improve the quality of life for people with arthritis. <https://www.cdc.gov/arthritis/interventions/index.htm>

The Bottom Line

It is possible to have more than one form of arthritis at the same time. There are many forms of arthritis and getting a doctor diagnoses for the specific type(s) can help result in the best treatment and management strategy. The earlier a person understands their arthritis, the earlier they can start managing the disease, reducing pain, improving function, and making healthy lifestyle changes.

Resources

<https://www.arthritis.org/about-arthritis/understanding-arthritis/what-is-arthritis.php>

<https://www.cdc.gov/arthritis/basics/index.html>

<https://www.arthritis.org.uk/our-services-and-support/stories/1282-gillian>

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/01/04/well/patient-voices-arthritis.html#jennifer>

<https://www.arthritis.org/about-arthritis/types/osteoarthritis/symptoms.php>

<https://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/arthritis/index.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/arthritis/basics/physical-activity-overview.html>

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/acr.23425>

https://www.cdc.gov/arthritis/data_statistics/cost.htm

<https://www.cdc.gov/arthritis/interventions/index.htm>