

Orthopedic Center of Excellence

**Good Samaritan
Medical Center**

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The ABCs of Osteoarthritis

“Hands, shoulders, hips, and knees” sounds a lot like a favorite childhood game. But if your joints are feeling creakier than usual, you may be one of the 50 million American adults who are coping with osteoarthritis (OA).

What is osteoarthritis?

Osteoarthritis – from the Greek *arthro* (joint) + *-itis* (inflammation) – is a degenerative bone disease. It causes cartilage found in healthy joints to break down, removing the cushion between bones that helps to protect and absorb impact.

OA is usually the result of normal wear and tear or overuse, but can also result from a direct injury. It’s different from other forms of arthritis, such as rheumatoid arthritis, an autoimmune disease in which the body’s immune system attacks its own tissue, resulting in pain, stiffness and inflammation of the joints.

Who develops OA?

About half of adults age 65 or older have arthritis in some form. OA affects more women (25.9 percent of the U.S. population) than men (18.3 percent). OA of the knee, one of the most common forms, will affect 46 percent of people in their lifetime. And with the explosion of the baby boomer generation, the 55+ age group – peak knee pain candidates – will grow three times the average rate of the U.S. population, reaching 96 million by 2020.

However, David S. Worman, MD, a board certified orthopedic surgeon who performs joint replacements at Good Samaritan Medical Center, notes that OA is not just a function of aging. OA can be a progressive disease process that can affect people of all ages and backgrounds.

“Former or longtime athletes may develop OA years after an injury, or after years of intense activity,” says Dr. Worman. “Other factors may be job-related – for example, laborers, like construction workers or fisherman, or even jobs that involve repetitive motion, such as factory or assembly line workers. Although being overweight may not be a direct cause of arthritis, it is an additional risk, since extra weight puts stress on hips, knees, ankles and feet. Genetics also have been found to play a role, as people whose parents have arthritis are at higher risk.”

How does OA feel?

Arthritis can cause joint pain that ranges from mild to severe. Other symptoms may include:

- stiffness, which may be eased by mild activity – for example, stiffness when getting out of bed in the morning that subsides after moving around
- cracking or crunching noise in the joint when moving
- swelling, redness and/or warmth around the joint
- reduced range of motion

Treating your aching joints

Although there is no cure for OA, it often can be managed non-surgically.

“Prior to surgical treatment, we first recommend conservative approaches to managing osteoarthritis,” says Dr. Worman. “These can include:

- Exercise that builds muscle around the joints and helps support them. This can minimize wear and tear on the joint.
- Weight loss. “In someone with knee pain,” says Dr. Worman, “every one pound of weight lost can result in a four-pound reduction in the load exerted on the knee for each step taken during daily activities.”
- Over-the-counter pain relievers such as acetaminophen, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs such as aspirin, ibuprofen or naproxen; or certain prescription medications.(if approved by the patient’s medical doctor)
- Injections, such as cortisone and viscosupplements, that can reduce inflammation or lubricate the joint
- Low-impact exercises, such as biking or swimming, that keep joints loose and can be beneficial for weight loss.

“If these measures don’t bring relief, we can help determine if surgery is an option,” says Dr. Worman. Arthritis can be progressively disabling and some people do not respond to non-surgical measures as well as we would like. “Fortunately, for those patients, joint replacement surgery is a reliable and effective way to eliminate the severe pain associated with OA and restore the high quality of life we all deserve.”

Need help with your OA?

There are many solutions to help manage osteoarthritis. If joint pain, stiffness or swelling is keeping you from enjoying the things you love, be sure to see your doctor. Being proactive can help you live a more pain-free, independent life!

CONTACT US

For more information about our Orthopedic services visit us at GoodSamaritanMedical.org/Orthopedics

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