



# Osteoarthritis

By Dr. Aaron Dutruch D.C.

TO UNDERSTAND OSTEOARTHRITIS, IT'S IMPORTANT TO HAVE A BASIC UNDERSTANDING OF THE STRUCTURES THAT IT AFFECTS, OUR JOINTS. JOINTS ARE A CLOSED SYSTEM MADE UP OF TWO BONES COMING TOGETHER WITH CARTILAGE BETWEEN THEM. THOSE BONES ARE SURROUNDED BY A FIBROUS MATERIAL KNOWN AS THE JOINT CAPSULE, THAT IS FILLED WITH A LIQUID CALLED SYNOVIAL FLUID, WHICH ACTS AS A LUBRICANT FOR THE JOINT.

Osteoarthritis is commonly described as “age related arthritis” but this is partly inaccurate. Although osteoarthritis is the most common type of arthritis seen in older patients, it could be better described as “wear and tear arthritis”, as it is the breakdown of the joints over time from over or improper use. It usually affects the weight bearing joints in the lower extremities, such as our lower back, hips, knees and ankles.

**What to look for:** The symptoms of osteoarthritis range from minor to severe depending on how long the process is going on. In the beginning stage there is little to no pain and it's hard to detect, but with imaging you can see the beginning of bone spurs around the joints. When most patients realize something is going on they are in the second stage of the condition, noting joint stiffness or pain after longer periods of rest, and noticing it gets better when they start to move around. During the third stage, there is a breakdown of the cartilage, and this causes more joint discomfort or pain, especially with activity (walking, running, kneeling, etc.). In the fourth stage of osteoarthritis, the joint space

is notably reduced, which causes an increase in the damage of the cartilage and even more severe pain with motion of the joints.

**What can help:** The first stage of osteoarthritis begins without pain or much discomfort, but you can help to slow the breakdown of the joints by making sure you are engaging in proper biomechanics and safety. If you have a job or hobby that requires a lot of lifting, bending, kneeling or similar activity, be mindful of your posture and make sure you are wearing the proper equipment. For example, good shoes if you do a lot of walking and knee pads if you do a lot kneeling. These can absorb some of the impact of these activities.

**Stretching and exercise** is also particularly important. If the muscles are tight or weak around the joints, they may not allow the joints to move the way they should and can increase pressures on the them. Yoga and Pilates are excellent ways to both stretch and strengthen the joints and their supporting structures.

**Nutrition** is also important regarding arthritis. The “itis” portion of “arthritis” means there is inflammation.

Starting an anti-inflammatory diet such as the Mediterranean diet can be incredibly helpful in controlling the symptoms of inflammation, regardless of the stage of the condition. Some studies also show the use of ginger, garlic, turmeric and other natural supplements can help with overall inflammation and reduce joint pain.

The takeaway is that although osteoarthritis is mostly seen in older adults, it really starts when we are younger. You can minimize the effects by being aware of your diet, exercising often, and generally taking care of the body you have. It's never too late to start. Ask your primary care, chiropractor or physical therapist if you aren't sure where to begin. We would love to help get you moving better.

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