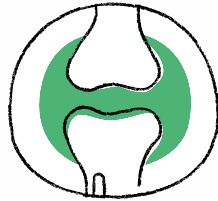




Understanding Osteoarthritis (OA)

A Guide For Patients



What is OA?

- Osteoarthritis (OA) is the most common type of arthritis.
- It happens when the protective cartilage in the joints breaks down over time.
- OA is often called “wear-and-tear” arthritis, but it’s not just aging; many factors (genetics, past injuries, weight, joint overuse, muscle weakness) can contribute.

What OA is NOT

- OA is not an autoimmune disease like rheumatoid arthritis or lupus.
- It does not mean your joints are “bone on bone” overnight. It develops gradually.
- OA is not always disabling; many people manage symptoms and stay active.

Common Symptoms

- Joint pain or aching (worse with activity)
- Morning stiffness or stiffness after rest
- Limited movement or flexibility
- Swelling or bony enlargement of joints

Risk Factors for OA

- Previous joint injury or joint overuse
- Obesity - Extra weight adds additional stress on weight bearing joints
- Age - The risk of developing OA increases with age
- Genetics - People with relatives with OA are more likely to develop it themselves
- Gender - Women, esp >50 yo, are more likely to develop OA than men

What Can You Do

- Stay active with low-impact exercise
- Strengthen muscles with PT or light strength training
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Protect your joints (supportive shoes, braces, tools)
- Use pain relief strategies safely (heat, ice, meds as advised)
- Support whole health with good sleep, diet, stress management





Myths vs Facts

Myth: OA pain means more damage is happening.

Fact: Pain levels don't always match the amount of joint changes. Some people have significant X-ray changes but little pain, and others have pain with only mild changes.

Myth: Rest is best for OA.

Fact: Too much rest can make joints stiffer and weaker. Gentle, regular movement actually improves pain and function.

Myth: Only meds/surgery can help OA.

Fact: Lifestyle changes, physical therapy, exercise, and joint protection strategies are very effective parts of treatment.

Myth: If I have OA in one joint, it will spread everywhere.

Fact: OA does not "spread" like an infection. Each joint is affected separately, though risk factors (like age, genetics, weight) can affect multiple joints.

Myth: Cold weather makes OA worse

Fact: Some people notice more stiffness in cold/damp weather, but it doesn't cause progression. It just affects symptoms temporarily.

Team Effort in Treatment



You: Take an active role in self-care and share symptoms



Doctor: Guides diagnosis and treatment



Occupational Therapist: Makes daily tasks easier



Physical Therapist: Builds strength and safe movement



Support system: Encourages and motivates you



Diet & OA

Foods that support joint health:

- Colorful fruits & vegetables
- Whole grains
- Fatty fish (salmon, tuna, sardines)
- Olive oil, nuts, avocado
- Calcium & vitamin D sources (dairy, leafy greens, fortified foods)

Limit:

- Processed foods & sugary drinks
- Excess red/processed meats
- Too much alcohol

Key Takeaway

OA is common but manageable. With self-care and a team approach, you can protect your joints and continue living well.

