

Dr Sarah Watts - Non-Surgical Treatment of Osteoarthritis

What is osteoarthritis?

Osteoarthritis is “wear-and-tear” of joints in the body.

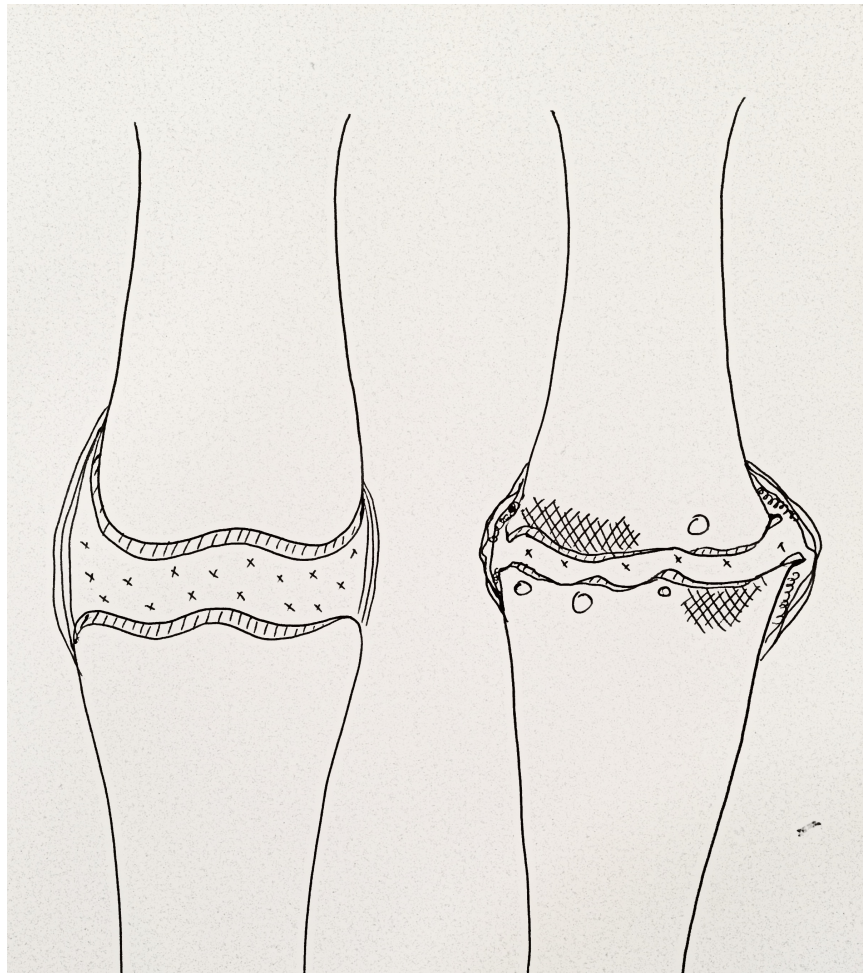
Why does osteoarthritis happen?

Osteoarthritis is more common after middle age. Risk factors include obesity, previous trauma and fractures, and a positive family history.

What happens to my joint when I have osteoarthritis?

Normal joint

Arthritic Joint



- *Thick Cartilage
- * Healthy even bone
- *Smooth joint
- Adequate joint space
- *Even surfaces
- *Smooth on smooth

- *Thin cartilage
- *Hardened bone
- *Cysts formed
- *Spurs
- *Reduced joint space
- *Irregular surfaces
- *Abnormal wear
- *Rough on rough

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What does osteoarthritis feel like?

Osteoarthritis can affect any joint in the body. It can be mild, moderate or severe. Symptoms include:

- A dull aching pain
- Pain that gets worse with activity
- Joint stiffness
- Restricted range of motion
- Knobbles and bumps over the joint edges
- Joint deformity
- Joint swelling and inflammation
- Clicking, grinding, seizing and crackling of the joint

What can I do without having surgery?

1. **Weight loss** – weight bearing joints (feet, ankles, knees, hips and spine) work harder when they have more weight to carry. Losing weight can help ease the symptoms of osteoarthritis, by reducing the “work” of the joint. This strategy can be very effective in reducing your symptoms.
2. **Stay active and exercise** – regular low impact exercise (stretching, walking, swimming and cycling) can improve the symptoms of arthritis. High impact or high resistance activities (aerobics, running, stair climbing and jumping) can aggravate arthritic complaints.
3. **Simple analgesia** – simple over the counter medication (Panadol, Panadol Osteo) can be taken before activity, or “as needed” to ease the symptoms of arthritis. It can be taken regularly (in accordance with the recommended dosing) when symptoms are worse.
4. **Anti-inflammatories** – There are “over-the-counter” and “script only” medicines available. Talk to your doctor about the best option for you. If you are able to take anti-inflammatory medications, they may be taken before activity, or “as needed” to ease the symptoms of arthritis. They also can be taken regularly in accordance with the recommended dosing schedule, when symptoms are worse.
5. **Supplements** – Certain herbal tonics and supplements have been shown to modify the symptoms of arthritis. They do not cure your condition. They usually need to be taken regularly to offer you benefit. Supplements include glucosamine and chondroitin, fish oil, and turmeric. Check with your pharmacist to ensure they do not interact with your current medications.
6. **Orthotics and braces** – There are many orthotic and bracing options available for arthritic conditions. Foot, knee and ankle arthritis may respond to corrective inserts, and braces. Speak to your doctor about your requirements.
7. **Topical liniments** – there are comforting liniments and rubs that may relieve your arthritic symptoms. These may be as simple as “deep heat”, or other herbal balms, but can include some medicated rubs.
8. **Hot packs** – Topical heat increases the circulation to the joint, which helps relieve local pain. Try a wheat bag or a hot water bottle to the region. Avoid this altogether if you have diabetes or neuropathy.
9. **Injections** – You may be recommended a guided joint injection for your arthritis. This injection will be instilled to the inside of the joint, via a needle, using ultrasound “vision”. This injection acts as a depot of anti-inflammatory, helping to calm any inflammation in the joint, when you have a flare of symptoms. The injection is temporary, but one dose can help calm arthritic symptoms for weeks to months.