

# Arthritis



## WHAT IS ARTHRITIS?

*The word arthritis literally means inflammation of the joint ("Arth" meaning joint and "itis" meaning inflammation).*

*Inflammation is a medical term that indicates pain, stiffness, redness, and swelling.*

### DID YOU KNOW?

There are over 100 different types of arthritis. To keep things simple we will divide arthritis into two categories – inflammatory and degenerative.

### WHAT IS DEGENERATIVE ARTHRITIS?

When a joint degenerates, the cartilage gradually becomes rough, begins to wear away, and the bone underneath thickens. With this degeneration, the joint may in fact, become inflamed with pain, warmth, and swelling.

Cartilage is the tough elastic material that covers and protects the ends of bones. In healthy joints, when you put weight on the joint, cartilage acts as a shock absorber. The slippery surface of the cartilage also allows the joints to move smoothly.

Degenerative arthritis, also known as osteoarthritis (OA), tends to affect the joint at the base of the thumb, the end joints and / or middle joints of the fingers, the hips, the knees, and the joints at the base of the big toe. Though degenerative arthritis could have started earlier, most people begin to notice the symptoms as they get into their 40's or 50's.

A person with degenerative joint disease may notice some stiffness of the affected joint in the morning lasting about 15-20 minutes. As the day progresses and the joints are used, the pain and discomfort usually gets worse. Resting the joints tends to provide relief.

### WHAT IS INFLAMMATORY ARTHRITIS?

Inflammatory arthritis can affect any joint in the body. The most common type of inflammatory arthritis is rheumatoid arthritis (RA) and tends to involve the small joints of the hands and feet. Inflammatory arthritis can begin in a number of different ways. The most common way is a slow onset of joint pain and stiffness starting in one joint and spreading to involve more joints over a period of weeks to months. It can also start very dramatically (almost overnight) or can start slowly with pain in joints that seems to "jump around" from joint to joint.

Inflammatory arthritis causes aching, pain, stiffness, warmth, and swelling in the joints which are affected. The most striking characteristic is feeling stiff in the joints after rest. This is particularly apparent in the morning when the stiffness may take hours before feeling "looser". In some people, the inflammation in the joints may be accompanied by a loss of energy (fatigue). Other symptoms might include low grade fevers, weight loss, muscle pain, or numbness and tingling in the fingers.

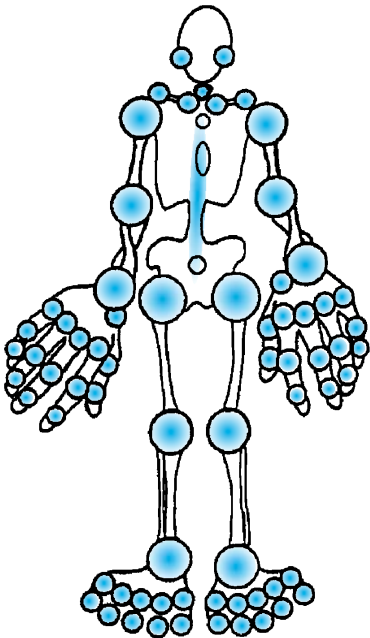
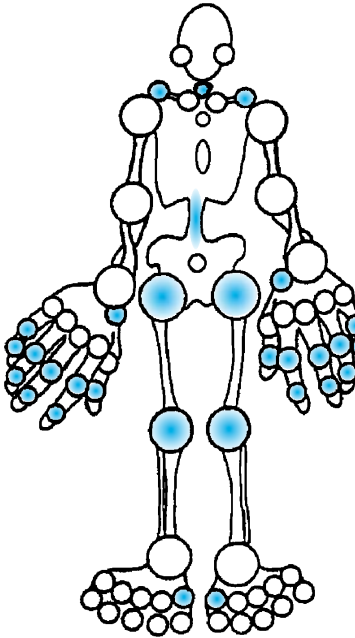
Each joint in the body is lined by a thin layer of tissue called synovium. The synovium is responsible for making small amounts of fluid to keep the normal joint lubricated. In cases of inflammatory arthritis, for some reason the body's immune system becomes confused and begins to attack the synovium. Chemicals released by the body's immune system cause swelling, pain, and stiffness of the joints and can eventually damage or destroy the cartilage and bone.

Most people have symptoms that continue steadily while others have symptoms that seem to wax and wane, with times of more severe joint pain and stiffness alternating with better times. The severity of symptoms varies greatly from person to person.

Once it is established, inflammatory arthritis is a chronic condition which will likely affect you for the rest of your life. As such, you will need some type of medication to control your disease. It is usually a balancing act between taking as much medication as needed to control the arthritis and as little medication as necessary to prevent side-effects. Your doctor will adjust your dose or change your medications based on the latest results from your symptoms, findings on physical examination, and your laboratory tests.



## A COMPARISON OF INFLAMMATORY & DEGENERATIVE ARTHRITIS

FEATURES	INFLAMMATORY ARTHRITIS	DEGENERATIVE ARTHRITIS
Give some examples of diseases?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ rheumatoid arthritis</li> <li>→ psoriatic arthritis</li> <li>→ ankylosing spondylitis</li> <li>→ systemic lupus erythematosus</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ osteoarthritis</li> <li>→ degenerative disc disease</li> </ul>
Who gets it?	→ Usually starts in middle age (30-60) and tends to get worse over time. However, it can start at any age	→ Is a joint disease that is more common as we age and tends to occur in joints which have been subject to "wear and tear" by excessive use
What is the cause?	→ The body's immune system attacks the joints ("Autoimmune")	→ Degeneration of cartilage
How does it start?	→ Fairly quickly adding joints over a period of weeks to months	→ Usually slowly with joints getting worse over a period of months to years
How many joints does it affect?	→ Usually affects many joints and tends to be symmetrical involving joints on both sides of the body (i.e. both hands, both elbows etc)	→ Usually affects one or two joints and tends to be asymmetrical ("not matching") swelling and pain in single joints that are not part of a pair (i.e. one knee, one finger etc)
What joints can be affected?	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Small joints of the hands and feet</li> <li>→ Wrists, elbows, shoulders, neck, spine, knees, and hips</li> <li>→ Any joint can be affected</li> </ul>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ End joints of the fingers</li> <li>→ Neck, lower back, knees and hips</li> </ul>
What are the usual symptoms?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Joint pain, swelling, tenderness, and redness of the joints</li> <li>→ Prolonged morning stiffness; and less range of movement.</li> <li>→ Some people also experience fever, weight loss, fatigue, and/or anemia.</li> </ul>	→ Affected joints may become stiff, painful and swollen
Morning stiffness?	→ Morning stiffness lasting more than 60 minutes	→ Morning stiffness lasting more than 20 minutes
What medications are available?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs)</li> <li>→ Disease Modifying Anti-Rheumatic Drugs (DMARDs)</li> <li>→ Steroids</li> <li>→ Biologics</li> <li>→ Steroid Injections</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Analgesics</li> <li>→ NSAIDs</li> <li>→ Injections: Steroids &amp; Viscosupplementation (Hyaluronic Acid)</li> </ul>

## Treating Your Arthritis

The treatment options for your arthritis will likely include **non-medication therapies** such as physiotherapy, occupational therapy, education, exercise, relaxation techniques and **medications**. Medications to treat arthritis can be divided into two general categories – **those which only control symptoms and those which control the symptoms and the disease**. To get the best results, you need to form close ties with your healthcare team and become a full partner in your healthcare treatment.

### 5 Tips for Fighting Arthritis

- 1. Get Educated:** Know the type of arthritis you have and the treatments available.
- 2. Stay Involved:** Be an active participant in decisions about your care.
- 3. Know Your Resources:** Know where to get the support and resources you need.
- 4. Stay Healthy:** Exercise regularly, eat a balanced healthy diet, and maintain a healthy weight.
- 5. Know Your Medications:** Tell your health care provider(s) about all of the prescription and non-prescription medications you are taking.

### HOW CAN YOU FIGHT ARTHRITIS?

Call The Arthritis Society. This toll-free number can connect you with trained volunteers who can provide you with support and information.

**1.800.321.1433**

### Join the Free Arthritis Registry

You will receive specific information you need to manage your arthritis and improve your quality of life.

[www.arthritis.ca/registry](http://www.arthritis.ca/registry)

### Enroll in the Arthritis Self-Management Program (ASMP)

ASMP is a six week program for people living with arthritis, their family and friends. Trained leaders with first hand experience of arthritis lead the weekly small, interactive two-hour workshops. Program participants will gain self-confidence in their ability to control symptoms, learn how to develop action plans to manage how arthritis affects their lives, and make connections with others living with arthritis.

[www.arthritis.ca/asmp](http://www.arthritis.ca/asmp)

### Use Arthritis Friendly Products

The Arthritis Society is proud to be able to recognize manufacturers that have designed products that are easy to use for people living with arthritis. For a complete list of products that have been commended by The Arthritis Society and deemed "Arthritis Friendly" visit [www.arthritis.ca/arthritisfriendly](http://www.arthritis.ca/arthritisfriendly).

For more information on medications visit [www.arthritis.ca/tips/medications](http://www.arthritis.ca/tips/medications)

**ARTHRITIS FIGHT IT!**

To support arthritis research or to learn more, contact The Arthritis Society:  
1.800.321.1433 [www.arthritis.ca](http://www.arthritis.ca)

  
**The Arthritis Society**