

Arthritis

Take Control, Live Better



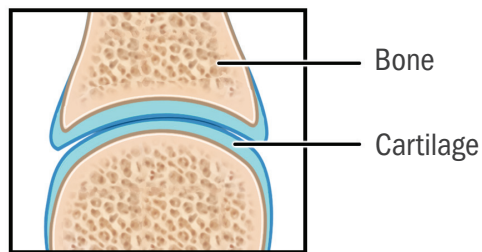
Arthritis

Arthritis is a breakdown of the cartilage that cushions your joints. A joint is any place where two or more bones connect, like the knee, hip, wrist, or shoulder. When the cartilage wears down, the bones rub against each other. This causes pain and stiffness.

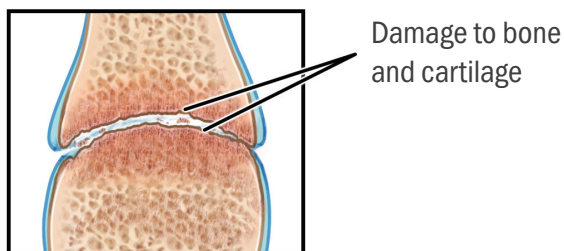
Osteoarthritis is the most common form of arthritis. Almost all people older than 65 have it in their hands. A third have it in their knees. It can also affect the joints of the spine, hips, or feet.



Healthy joint



Osteoarthritis



In osteoarthritis, the cartilage that cushions the joints breaks down, and the bones rub against each other.

When you have arthritis, even simple, everyday movements can hurt. Walking a few steps, opening a door, or combing your hair may be hard. You may feel especially stiff in the morning until you start moving around.

But there are many things you can do to help with pain and make it easier for you to move. You can also do things to keep the damage from getting worse. Most people can deal with their symptoms at home with a little help from their doctor.

What you can do

- ▶ **Get regular exercise.** This can help make your joints stronger and better able to move. Avoid or change any activity that causes lasting pain.
- ▶ **Use tools** that make it easier to do your daily activities, such as a reacher or a cane.
- ▶ **Reach and stay at a healthy weight.** This puts less stress on your joints.

When to call a doctor

Call a doctor now if:

- ▶ You have sudden swelling, warmth, or pain in any joint.
- ▶ You have joint pain and a fever or rash.
- ▶ You have such bad joint pain that you can't use a joint.
- ▶ You have serious side effects from your medicine (such as severe stomach pain, vomiting, or stools that are black or look like tar).

Contact your doctor if:

- ▶ You have joint symptoms that continue even with more than 6 weeks of care at home.
- ▶ Your joint pain gets much worse.
- ▶ You have heartburn, mild stomach pain, nausea, or other problems with your medicine.

Treatment

Treatment can help reduce your symptoms and help you lead a full and active life.

The focus of treatment is to:

- ▶ Reduce pain and stiffness.
- ▶ Keep your joints working well.
- ▶ Keep you from becoming disabled.
- ▶ Prevent more damage to your joints.

Medicines

The goal of medicine is to keep your joints working and to relieve pain while causing few side effects.

The type of medicine depends on how bad your pain is. For instance:

- ▶ **If your pain is mild**, you may only need pain medicines that you can buy without a prescription. These include acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin), and naproxen (Aleve). Talk to your doctor about whether these medicines are safe for you and how much to take.
- ▶ **If your pain is severe**, you may need a stronger prescription medicine. You'll take this medicine for a long time, so you'll need to see your doctor for regular checkups.

Medicines that help some people don't work for others. Be sure to tell your doctor if the medicine you're taking doesn't help. You may need to try a few medicines to find what works best for you.



Ice and heat

Many people use ice, heat, or both on their sore joints. Heat often works well for pain and stiffness caused by not using a joint. You can try heat and ice to find what helps most.

For example:

- ▶ Use heat 2 or 3 times a day for 20 to 30 minutes. Use a heating pad, hot shower, or hot pack.
- ▶ Put ice or a cold pack on a painful joint for 10 to 15 minutes. Be sure to put a thin cloth between ice and your skin.
- ▶ Switch between heat and cold.
- ▶ Ask your doctor about paraffin wax. This type of moist heat may help if you have pain and stiffness in your hands or feet.

- ▶ If you're stiff when you wake up, take a warm shower or bath. Keep moving around after you're done so your joints don't stiffen up.

Physical therapy

Physical therapy (PT) can make it easier to do daily activities, such as walking, going up stairs, or getting in and out of bed.

PT may include stretching, core exercises, weight lifting, and walking. Your physical therapist may teach you an exercise program you can do at home.

A physical therapist also may use manual therapy and techniques such as heat and ultrasound.



Did you know?

A lack of exercise can cause your muscles and joints to become weak. But light to moderate exercise can help keep your muscles strong, reduce joint pain and stiffness, and slow the time it takes for arthritis to get worse.

Ice and cold packs

You can use any of these items to “ice” an area:

- ▶ **A cold pack** you buy at the drugstore or grocery store.
- ▶ **A homemade cold pack.** Seal 1 pint of rubbing alcohol and 3 pints of water in a 1-gallon, heavy-duty, plastic freezer bag. Seal that bag inside a second bag. Mark it “Cold pack: Do not eat,” and store it in the freezer.
- ▶ **A bag of frozen vegetables.** Peas or corn work well. Label the bag “Do not eat.” You can reuse the bag several times.
- ▶ **An ice towel.** Wet a towel with cold water, and squeeze it until it is just damp. Fold the towel, place it in a plastic bag, and freeze it for 15 minutes. Take the towel out of the bag.
- ▶ **An ice pack.** Put about a pound of ice in a plastic bag. Add water to barely cover the ice. Squeeze the air out of the bag and seal it. Wrap the bag in a damp towel.

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There are many things to consider if you're thinking about joint replacement surgery.

For help deciding about knee replacement, go to <https://www.cigna.com/individuals-families/health-wellness/hw/medical-topics/arthritis-uh1514>.

For help deciding about hip replacement, go to <https://www.cigna.com/individuals-families/health-wellness/hw/medical-topics/arthritis-uh1515>.

For help deciding about shoulder replacement, go to <https://www.cigna.com/individuals-families/health-wellness/hw/medical-topics/arthritis-bo1198>.

Occupational therapy

Occupational therapy focuses on helping people be as independent as possible.

An occupational therapist may:

- ▶ Help you learn ways to do things such as dressing, cooking, and eating.
- ▶ Teach exercises to improve posture and increase joint motion as well as overall strength and flexibility.
- ▶ Assess your daily needs and home and work environments.
- ▶ Teach you how to use assistive devices.

Alternative therapies

Many people use complementary or alternative medicine for arthritis symptoms. For example, they might use capsaicin cream, acupuncture, or dietary supplements like glucosamine and chondroitin.

Be sure to tell your doctor if you're using a complementary or alternative therapy or if you're thinking about trying one. He or she can discuss the pros and cons of these treatments and whether any of them may interfere with your standard care. For example, some supplements and herbal medicines may cause problems if you take them with another medicine.

Surgery

If you have severe pain and loss of function, and if other treatments don't help enough, you may think about surgery to replace the joint.

This is most often done on hips or knees. It can also be done on shoulders and other joints.

Replacing the joint may mean less pain and better ability to use the joint. But it doesn't mean that the joint will be the same as it was before you developed arthritis.

Here are things to think about:

- ▶ Having a joint replaced is almost never urgent. You have time to learn more about it and decide whether it's right for you.
- ▶ After surgery, it will take several months of rehab and physical therapy to get the best use of your new joint.
- ▶ You're likely to get better results if you're in good shape when you have the surgery. It's important to be active and stay at a healthy weight before and after the surgery.
- ▶ Replacement joints don't last forever. In time, you may need to replace the joint again.

Getting active

Exercise is one of the best things you can do to help keep arthritis from getting worse. It can help keep your muscles strong and reduce joint pain and stiffness.

Before you get started, ask your doctor what kind of activity would be good for you.

To exercise safely:

- ▶ **Pace yourself**, especially if you haven't been active for a while. Start slowly, and don't push yourself too hard.
- ▶ **Use pain medicine** before or after exercise as suggested by your doctor.
- ▶ **Ice joints** that hurt after exercise.
- ▶ **Rest your joints** if they're swollen. For example, if your knees are swollen, try to avoid stairs for a few days. Walk a shorter distance, or switch to swimming or riding an indoor bike.

If you have joint pain that lasts for more than a day after you exercise:

- ▶ **Rest the joint** until your pain gets back to the level that's normal for you.
- ▶ **Exercise for less time** or with less effort.
- ▶ **Try another exercise** that doesn't cause pain.

What type of exercise is best?

In general, swimming, water aerobics, biking, and walking are great ways to be active. They don't irritate your joints as much as some other exercises.

Try some stretching every day. Put each joint through its full range of motion once or twice a day.

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If you want to be more active but aren't sure how to get started, go to <https://www.cigna.com/individuals-families/health-wellness/hw/medical-topics/osteoarthritis-tr4782>.



Exercises for arthritis in the hand

These exercises can help stretch and strengthen the muscles in your hands and fingers and reduce pain and stiffness. Before you try any exercises, talk to your doctor or physical therapist. He or she can help design an exercise plan that's best for you.

Do these exercises until you feel a mild stretch. Never push to a strong stretch. If you feel pain when you do these exercises, stop.

Tendon glides



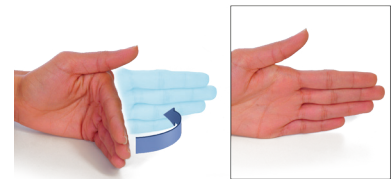
1. With one hand, point your fingers and thumb straight up.
2. Then, curl your fingers so that the top two joints in them are bent and your fingers wrap down. Your fingertips should touch or be near the base of your fingers. Your fingers will look like a hook.
3. Next, make a fist by bending your knuckles.
4. Then, unwind your fingers slightly so that your fingertips can touch the base of your palm.
5. Move back to the starting position, with your fingers and thumb pointing up.
6. Repeat the series of motions 8 to 12 times.
7. Switch hands and repeat steps 1 through 6.

Finger opposition



1. With one hand, point your fingers and thumb straight up.
2. Then, touch your thumb to each finger, one finger at a time. This will look like an "okay" sign, but try to keep your other fingers straight and pointing upward as much as you can.
3. Repeat 8 to 12 times.
4. Switch hands and repeat steps 1 through 3.

Intrinsic flexion



1. Rest one hand on a table, and bend the large joints where your fingers connect to your hand. Keep your thumb and the other joints in your fingers straight.
2. Slowly straighten your fingers. Your wrist should be relaxed, following the line of your fingers and thumb.
3. Move back to your starting position, with your hand bent.
4. Repeat 8 to 12 times.
5. Switch hands and repeat steps 1 through 4.

Exercises for arthritis of the knee

These exercises can help stretch and strengthen your leg muscles and reduce knee pain and stiffness. Before you try any exercises, talk to your doctor or physical therapist. He or she can help design an exercise plan that is best for you.

If you feel pain when you do these exercises, stop.

Straight-leg raises



1. Lie on your back with one knee bent so that your foot rests flat on the floor. Your other leg should be straight. Make sure that your low back has a normal curve. You should be able to slip your hand in between the floor and the small of your back, with your palm touching the floor and your back touching the back of your hand.
2. Tighten the thigh muscles in your straight leg by pressing the back of your knee flat down to the floor. Hold your knee straight.
3. Keeping the thigh muscles tight and your leg straight, lift your leg up so that your heel is about 12 inches off the floor. Hold for about 6 seconds, then lower slowly.
4. Relax for up to 10 seconds between repetitions.
5. Repeat 8 to 12 times.
6. Switch legs and repeat steps 1 through 5.

Quad sets



1. Sit with one leg straight and supported on the floor or a firm bed. Place a small, rolled-up towel under your knee. Your other leg should be bent, with that foot flat on the floor.
2. Tighten the thigh muscles of your straight leg by pressing the back of your knee down into the towel.
3. Hold for about 6 seconds, then rest for up to 10 seconds.
4. Repeat 8 to 12 times.
5. Switch legs and repeat steps 1 through 4.

Active knee flexion



1. Lie on your stomach with your knees straight. If your kneecap is uncomfortable, roll up a washcloth and put it under the leg that you're exercising just above the kneecap.
2. Bend one knee so that you bring your foot up toward your buttocks. If this motion hurts, try it without bending your knee quite as far. This may help you avoid any painful motion.
3. Slowly move your leg up and down.
4. Repeat 8 to 12 times.
5. Switch legs and repeat steps 1 through 4.

Helpful tips and tools

Pain and stiffness may make it hard for you to do your daily tasks. But you can use tools and make changes to help you move more easily and with less pain.

Try tools for home

- ▶ **Use doorknob covers** or replace round doorknobs with levers. You can push a lever with your elbow instead of twisting the knob. This takes the strain off your wrist and fingers.
- ▶ **Use a reacher** to pick up things from the floor or grab items that are hard to reach.

- ▶ **Use tools with large or padded handles**, such as utensils, pans, and toothbrushes.
- ▶ **Use electric tools**, such as a can opener and power tools.
- ▶ **Use higher chairs, seat cushions, and raised toilet seats.** These make it easier to sit down and stand up. Avoid low seats that are hard to get in and out of.
- ▶ **Put grab bars** near the shower or tub. Put no-slip tape or a bath mat in the bathtub.
- ▶ **Sit on a tall stool** for tasks that you'd normally do standing up, such as cooking.
- ▶ **Use tools to make dressing easier**, such as buttonhooks, long-handled shoehorns, and sock pullers. And choose clothes with Velcro instead of buttons or snaps.



Modify your work area

- ▶ **Use an adjustable chair** that supports your lower back. Adjust the height so your feet rest flat on the floor.
- ▶ **Use a keyboard tray** for your keyboard and mouse. Adjust the tray to a height that allows you to type with no pain.
- ▶ **Use a trackball or touch pad** instead of a standard mouse to reduce strain on your hand, wrist, and shoulder.
- ▶ **Adjust your monitor** so that the top of the screen is at about eye level.
- ▶ **Arrange your work area** so you can reach the things you use the most without bending or twisting.
- ▶ **Sit up straight.** Relax your shoulders, keep your feet flat on the floor, and don't lean forward too much.
- ▶ **Take breaks to stretch** or get out of your chair. This can help keep your muscles loose and your joints moving well.

Try a walking aid

A walker or cane helps to make up for having less strength, range of motion, joint stability, coordination, or endurance. It can also reduce the stress on a painful joint. Using a walking aid can help you be safer and more independent.

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Walking aids help take the stress off joints that hurt, and they can make it easier for you to walk.

- ▶ To learn how to use a cane, go to <https://www.cigna.com/individuals-families/health-wellness/hw/medical-topics/using-a-cane-zt1156>.
- ▶ To learn how to use a walker, go to <https://www.cigna.com/individuals-families/health-wellness/hw/medical-topics/using-a-walker-zt1154>.



Keep a pain diary

A pain diary may help you and your doctor find out what makes your pain better or worse. Use a pain diary to keep track of when you have pain, how bad it is, and what you're doing to treat it.

Daily pain diary

Pain scale										
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
No pain	Mild				Moderate			Severe		Worst pain

Date and time:

Pain-scale rating:

Medicine and dose:

Medicine side effects:

What made the pain better today?

What made the pain worse today?

Managing your weight

If you're overweight, losing weight may be one of the best things you can do for your arthritis. It helps take some of the stress off your joints.

If you want to get to a healthy weight and stay there, lifestyle changes will work better than dieting.

To reach a healthy weight:

► **Improve your eating habits.** Do it slowly. You may be tempted to follow a strict diet and change everything about the way you eat. But you'll be more successful if you work on one eating habit at a time.

► **Get moving.** Try to make physical activity a regular part of your day, like brushing your teeth is. Start small, and build up over time. Moderate activity is safe for most people, but it's a good idea to talk to your doctor before you start an exercise program.

► **Change your thinking.** Our thoughts have a lot to do with how we feel and what we do. Try to notice and stop negative thoughts. If you can choose more helpful thoughts, you may be surprised at how much healthier you feel—in mind and body.



Did you know?

To reduce pain and help your joints work better, even a small amount of weight loss combined with exercise often works better than either weight loss or exercise alone.

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Want to reach a healthier weight? For tips on how to get started, go to <https://www.cigna.com/individuals-families/health-wellness/hw/medical-topics/weight-management-aa122915>.





Did you know?

Studies have shown that people who are part of a support group and who take an education course, such as an arthritis management course from the Arthritis Foundation, have less pain and depression and are more mobile.

Coping and support

Living with arthritis can be stressful. You may worry about what your life may be like as your condition gets worse. But there are a lot of ways to cope with arthritis.

Ways to cope

Even with pain, there are some simple things you can do to feel better and keep the joy in your life.

- ▶ **Ask your family and friends for help**, especially on days when you have a lot of pain.
 - ▶ **Balance activity with rest.** If you get tired when you do a task, break it down into smaller tasks, and rest between them.
 - ▶ **Learn ways to reduce stress.** Stress can make pain feel worse. Try deep breathing, relaxation exercises, or meditation to reduce stress and relax your mind and muscles.
 - ▶ **Meet with friends.** Being social can help you feel better. If you isolate yourself, you may get depressed.
 - ▶ **See a counselor.** Cognitive-behavioral therapy can help you express concerns and learn new ways to cope with arthritis.
 - ▶ **Be creative.** Find ways to do things that you enjoy that doesn't cause pain. For example, use a sewing machine to make a quilt instead of stitching it by hand.
- ▶ **Join a support group.** You can share your concerns and hear how other people cope with arthritis. Online forums and chat groups are also good places to find support.
 - ▶ **Educate yourself.** The more you know about arthritis, the better you'll be able to cope with it. Encourage your family and friends to learn about it too.

At work

If arthritis makes it hard to do your job, talk to your boss about changes to your schedule or work area.

You might ask if you can:

- ▶ Have a later start time.
- ▶ Work part-time or work from home.
- ▶ Switch to a light-duty position, if your job involves a lot of lifting, bending, or standing.

Stay positive

Adopt a “good-health attitude” and healthy habits, such as eating a balanced diet and getting enough sleep. This will help you feel better and stay active.

Thinking in a positive way may help you:

- ▶ Care for yourself and handle the challenges of arthritis.
- ▶ Avoid or cope with stress, anxiety, and depression.

Bev's story

Bev isn't letting arthritis in her hands and back keep her from doing her favorite activity—gardening. Nor does she let it limit anything else in her life.

For instance, Bev plants her vegetables in flowerpots and raised garden beds instead of directly in the ground. This way, she doesn't have to bend down or kneel to care for them. She also uses tools that have large, curved handles, which help to take the pressure off the joints in her hands.

In the kitchen, she's replaced most of her eating and cooking utensils with "things that have a big, fat rubber handle. That's made a real difference," she says. "They're a whole lot easier to grip and less painful to use."

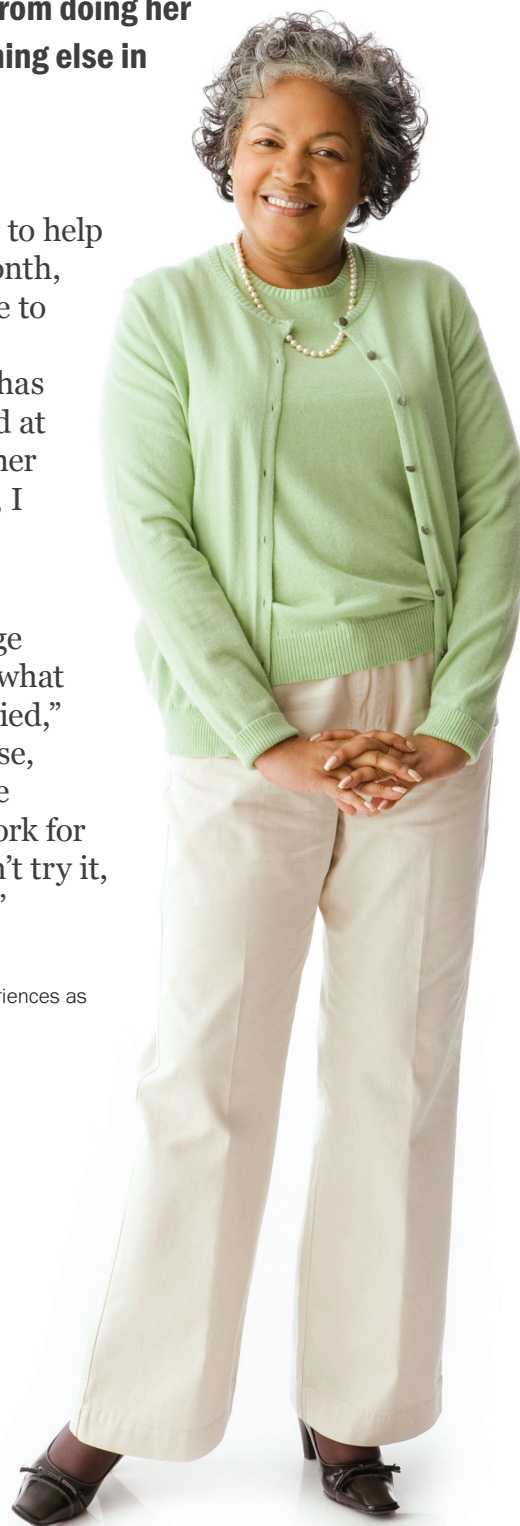
She also replaced her doorknobs with handles that have a lever. "They're easier to open and don't hurt my wrist," Bev says.

She's been able to keep her pain under control with over-the-counter pain medicine, massage, and acupuncture.

But massage and acupuncture seem to help the most. Each month, Bev gets a massage to loosen up tense muscles and then has tiny needles placed at certain points on her body. "For a while, I feel like a new person," she says.

"I always encourage people to find out what other folks have tried," Bev says. "Of course, what works for one person may not work for you. But if you don't try it, you'll never know."

Bev's story reflects her experiences as told in an interview.



When you have arthritis, it's important to plan ahead for what to do if your symptoms get worse. Work with your doctor to make a plan.

Symptom action plan

Name:

Doctor's name:

Doctor's phone number:

Other emergency contact numbers:

Next doctor visit date:

Questions for my doctor:

When should I call my doctor?

Call 911 if:

List of my medicines:

When to take my medicines:

What do I do if my symptoms get worse?

What do I need to check or keep track of? (such as weight or symptom changes)

Do I need to change my diet or activities? If so, what changes do I need to make?