

## WHERE TO GET HELP AND SUPPORT

**Arthritis Care**, Floor 4, Linen Court, 10 East Road, London N1 6AD  
[www.arthritiscare.org.uk](http://www.arthritiscare.org.uk)

Helpline 080 8800 4050 A voluntary organization for people with arthritis. They have an excellent booklet called "information for people with arthritis".

**Arthritis Research Campaign**, Copeman House, St Mary's Court, St Mary's Gate, Chesterfield, Derbyshire S41 7TD [www.arthritisresearchuk.org](http://www.arthritisresearchuk.org) Tel. 0300 790 0400 . Produce an excellent series of leaflets on all aspects of arthritis.

**The British Pain Society**, [www.britishpainsociety.org](http://www.britishpainsociety.org) 3rd Floor, Churchill House, 35 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4SG. Tel. 0207 269 7840  
 Can provide a booklet "Understanding and Managing Pain: Information for Patients."

*The Pain relief Foundation is not responsible for the content of any information provided by another organization and does not endorse any product or service mentioned or advised by any other organization.*

This booklet was written by the staff of the Pain Relief Foundation and endorsed by The Walton Centre Pain Team, Walton Center for Neurology & Neurosurgery, Lower Lane, Liverpool, L9 7LJ, UK . [www.thewaltoncentre.nhs.uk](http://www.thewaltoncentre.nhs.uk)

**The Pain Relief Foundation is a registered charity. If you found this leaflet useful please consider donating to the Foundation. Every donation helps to fund research into the treatment of chronic pain conditions. Registered Charity No.1156227**

Copies of this leaflet are available from The Pain Relief Foundation, Clinical Sciences Centre, University Hospital Aintree, Lower Lane, Liverpool L9 7AL, UK. Tel. 0151 529 5820, Fax. 0151 529 5821 Email: [Lorraine.roberts@painrelieffoundation.org.uk](mailto:Lorraine.roberts@painrelieffoundation.org.uk)

Other leaflets in the series:

Trigeminal Neuralgia	Phantom Limb Pain	Cancer Pain
Sciatica	Low back pain	Pain in Diabetes
Fibromyalgia	Shingles & PHN	Headache
Central Post Stroke Pain	Opioids for chronic pain	Drugs for nerve pain
Over-the-counter medicines for pain	Chronic Regional Pain Syndrome	

Disclaimer: If you have a pain problem which needs treatment you must contact your own doctor. He can refer you to a pain clinic in your area. This leaflet is for information only and should not be treated as a substitute for the medical advice of your doctor. The Pain Relief Foundation cannot offer individual medical advice.



# PAIN RELIEF FOUNDATION

[www.painrelieffoundation.org.uk](http://www.painrelieffoundation.org.uk)

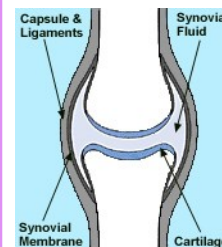
## ARTHRITIS

### WHAT IS ARTHRITIS?

- ◆ Arthritis is disease or damage to the joints. Only 20% of people with arthritis will experience pain. Pain can vary from mild to very severe. There is often less mobility in an arthritic joint. Arthritis can lead to long-term disability, especially if the joint is not regularly and gently exercised.
- ◆ Arthritis is very common in adults and it can also occur in children. There are many kinds of arthritis.
- ◆ **Osteoarthritis (OA)** is the most common form of arthritis, especially in the over 40s. It commonly occurs in weight bearing joints such as the knees & hips, and can also occur in the spine, hands and feet. The pain is a dull ache, which can sometimes be helped by rest or modifying normal activities. Vigorous activity may cause "flare-ups", although gentle exercise usually helps.
- ◆ **Rheumatoid arthritis (RA)** is a long-lasting disease, which affects the joints. It affects 1% of people and is common between the ages of 30-50 and 3 times more likely to occur in women than in men. It is common in the wrists, hands and feet, but it can affect many joints. Feelings of being unwell and tiredness are associated with rheumatoid arthritis.

### A JOINT

- ◆ A joint is where the ends of bones meet. The bone ends are covered with cartilage. This cushions the bones allowing free movement. Ligaments connect the bones stabilizing the joint, and muscles and tendons enable movement of the joint.



- ◆ The joint is surrounded by a capsule, which is lined with the synovial membrane. The space in the joint contains synovial fluid.

## WHAT CAUSES ARTHRITIS?

- ◆ **Osteoarthritis** develops gradually over many years. Old age and being overweight make osteoarthritis more likely. It may also occur as a result of injury, such as fractures, surgery on the joints, or excessive and repetitive use of joints, such as occurs in sportsmen and heavy manual workers.
- ◆ The cartilage covering the ends of the bones wears away or is damaged. The bone ends may thicken and bony outgrowths can form. The joint space between the bones narrows. Often there is some inflammation. The joint becomes stiff and painful and occasionally swollen.
- ◆ The joint tries to repair itself, often successfully. The tissues in the joint become more active than normal and new tissue is produced to repair the damage. However, sometimes the repair cannot compensate for the damage, then OA can seriously affect the joint.
- ◆ In severe OA the cartilage wears away completely and the bones ends touch. The bone ends begin to wear and the joint becomes unstable. Bones are forced out of their normal position, which leads to deformity.
- ◆ **Rheumatoid arthritis** is an inflammatory disease. The joints become swollen and hot. This inflammation causes joint damage. This happens because the body's natural defenses (the immune system) attack the joint. The reason for this auto-immune response is not known.
- ◆ Pain can be severe. Stiffness is usually worse in the morning or after periods of inactivity. Feeling tired and generally ill are some of the symptoms. In severe cases rheumatoid arthritis can become a chronic disabling condition.

## DIAGNOSIS

- ◆ Your doctor will be able to tell whether you have arthritis and which type you have from your medical history and a physical examination. X-rays may help to show the extent of involvement of the joints. Blood tests can help to confirm whether you have a rheumatic disease such as rheumatoid arthritis.

## WHICH IS THE BEST TREATMENT?

- ◆ There is no cure for arthritis. Treatment will help to reduce pain, increase mobility and improve strength. Your doctor will probably advise you to take painkillers and anti-inflammatory drugs, and to do gentle exercises.

## DRUGS

- ◆ Drugs which can be bought at the chemist, such as aspirin and ibuprofen will help the pain and inflammation. Paracetamol will help with pain.
- ◆ Your doctor may prescribe stronger non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as naproxen, meloxicam (Mobic®). All these drugs, except paracetamol, may cause side effects such as stomach irritation, especially in older people.
- ◆ It is also possible to inject a steroid, such as cortisone, into the joint. This may give temporary relief, but repeated use of steroids may damage the joint. In the case of rheumatic disease such as rheumatoid arthritis your specialist (a rheumatologist) may prescribe drugs which will change the effects of the disease. These drugs, such as methotrexate and sulfasalazine affect the body's response to the damage in the joint. These drugs may cause side effects, such as stomach irritation and rashes. Regular blood tests must be carried out during treatment with these drugs.

## EXERCISE

- ◆ Regular exercise is the best way of relieving the symptoms of arthritis. In the case of OA your physiotherapist will give you a moderate exercise programme to suit you. In RA a balance of relaxation and exercise is the best treatment. The exercises should be done when you are feeling less tired. Without regular exercise the joints will become stiffer, because exercise helps the scarring in the joint to soften, allowing more movement. However, over exercising can make the pain worse.
- ◆ An occupational therapist can advise you on the use of splints and other aids to make day to day tasks easier for you. These will help to keep joints moving but without causing damage to the joints.

## SURGERY

- ◆ Surgery is not a cure for arthritis but in some severe advanced cases certain operations such as joint replacement may help.
- ◆ **Arthroscopy** - Damaged joint lining, bone spurs, cysts or loose fragments of cartilage can be removed from the joint by key hole surgery.
- ◆ **Joint replacement** - The damaged joint is totally replaced with an artificial joint made of metal or plastic. This is called arthroplasty. This operation can give total pain relief and restore mobility to the joint.

## ARTHRITIS IN CHILDREN

- ◆ Most arthritis in childhood is juvenile idiopathic arthritis of which there are various kinds. There is inflammation in one or more joints resulting in pain and swelling. Depending on the type of juvenile arthritis the child may or may not feel generally unwell with fevers and rashes.
- ◆ Treatment for children with arthritis is the same as that for adults. Exercise is helpful, especially swimming and encouraging the child to lead as normal a life as possible.



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### OTHER TYPES OF ARTHRITIS

#### ANKYLOSING SPONDYLITIS (AS)

- ◆ AS is an inflammatory form of arthritis. It affects the joints in the lower back. They become inflamed and stiff. It usually occurs in the spine but may occur in the shoulders and sometimes the hips, only occasionally in the knees and ankles. Fatigue is common. Painful and blood shot eyes may occur (iritis). This needs immediate treatment to avoid damage to the eye. Severe disease can be disabling.
- ◆ Exercise is the best form of treatment, especially swimming.

#### GOUT

- ◆ Gout is a condition which occurs when uric acid crystals form in joints. This causes inflammation, pain and swelling. The joint aches and becomes red and swollen and extremely painful. It usually occurs in the joint at the base of the big toe. Attacks last for a few days.
- ◆ Anti-inflammatory drugs will help, except aspirin, which increases the amount of uric acid in the body. Losing weight and keeping fit will help prevent further attacks. Certain food will aggravate the condition such as red meat and alcohol. Uric acid formation can be reduced, by taking allopurinol tablets.

#### LUPUS (SYSTEMIC LUPUS ERYTHEMATOSUS)

- ◆ Lupus is a disease in which the body's natural defenses are upset. (Auto-immune disease). Cells and antibodies in the blood which normally defend the body from infection, attack the body instead causing inflammation. It can occur in any part of the body.
- ◆ Symptoms can vary. Often there is pain in the joints and rashes are common. During flare-ups 'flu-like symptoms are common. The disease may come and go over many years. Although there is inflammation in the joints there is no damage.
- ◆ The disease can be treated with various drugs such as steroids and anti-rheumatic drugs.

#### POLYMYALGIA RHEUMATICA

- ◆ This is an inflammatory condition affecting muscles in and around the shoulder, upper arms, buttocks and thighs. The cause is not known. It starts suddenly and there is stiffness and restricted movement. Joints are not affected. Tiredness, weight loss and appetite loss are also symptoms.
- ◆ The disease can be treated with steroids.