

Knee Osteoarthritis

What is osteoarthritis?

Osteoarthritis is a disease that happens when the protective cartilage in the joints wears down, and the bones rub against each other. The knee is a common place to get osteoarthritis.

Who gets it?

It is more common in people older than 50 years and in people who are overweight. Osteoarthritis runs in families. People who have had other knee problems are more likely to have knee osteoarthritis later in life.

How can I tell if I have it?

The most common symptoms are pain with activity, limited range of motion, stiffness, tenderness, swelling around the knee, feeling like the joint may “give out,” and deformity (such as knock knees or bowlegs). Your doctor will examine you and take x-rays to see if you have knee osteoarthritis.

How is it treated?

Pain medicine, exercise, and weight loss (if needed) are usually the first steps. Your doctor may want you to work with a physical therapist to strengthen the muscles around your knee. You can also take up to 4,000 mg of acetaminophen

(one brand: Tylenol) per day. This should be tried before any other medicines. If it doesn't control the pain, you can try ibuprofen (one brand: Motrin), or your doctor may give you prescription pain medicine. Joint supplements containing glucosamine also may help.

If none of these options helps you feel better, your doctor may want you to have a cortisone shot to reduce the swelling in the joint, or another kind of shot to help lubricate the joint. Knee replacement surgery is a last resort.

Where can I get more information?

Your doctor

AAFP's Patient Education Resource

Web site: <http://familydoctor.org/online/famdocen/home/common/bone/115.html>

About.com Arthritis Forum

Web site: <http://arthritis.about.com/forum>

American College of Rheumatology

Web site: http://www.rheumatology.org/practice/clinical/patients/diseases_and_conditions/osteoarthritis.asp

The Arthritis Foundation

Web site: <http://www.arthritis.org>

UpToDate

Web site: <http://www.uptodate.com/contents/patient-information-arthritis>

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This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <http://familydoctor.org>.

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