

Understanding Hip & Knee

Osteoarthritis

A PATIENT GUIDE

Learn what osteoarthritis is, what treatments are available, and how you can stay active.



Reduce Pain

Improve Daily Comfort



Stay Active

Keep doing the things you enjoy

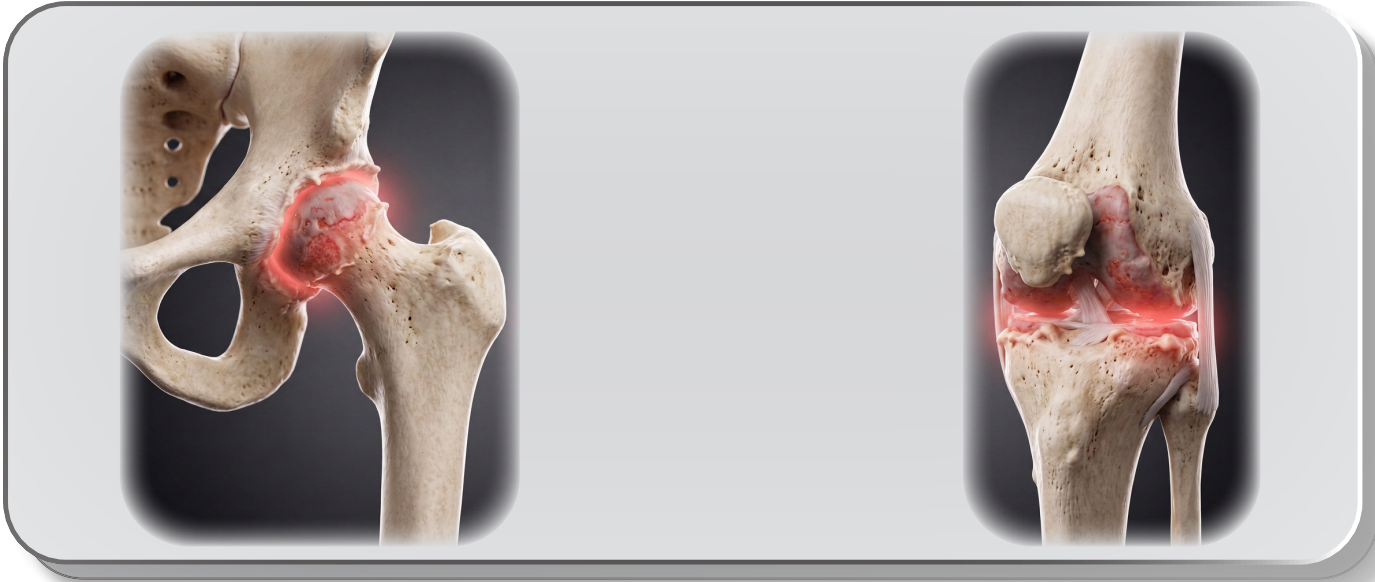


Work Together

Partner with your healthcare team



What Is Osteoarthritis?



Osteoarthritis (OA) is a long-lasting joint disease that causes the joint to break down over time. This guide focuses on OA of the hip and knee. OA usually develops slowly and becomes more common as people get older. OA is common, but it can affect each person differently.

People with hip or knee osteoarthritis may have pain, stiffness, swelling, or reduced movement. Symptoms may be mild at first and can change over time. As osteoarthritis progresses, pain may begin to interfere with everyday activities such as walking, standing for long periods, climbing stairs, or sleeping.

Hip and knee osteoarthritis can affect your quality of life, but many people successfully manage their symptoms through a combination of treatments and healthy lifestyle habits. Working with your healthcare team can help you make informed decisions about your care and choose treatments that best meet your individual needs and reduce these symptoms.



Pain



Stiffness



Swelling



Reduced Motion

What Causes Osteoarthritis?

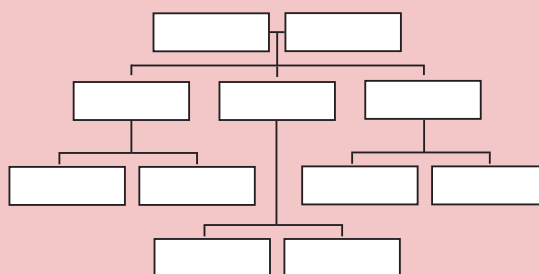
There is no single cause of osteoarthritis. Instead, several factors may increase the chance of developing hip or knee osteoarthritis. Some of these factors cannot be changed, while others may be managed through healthy lifestyle choices.

Things You Cannot Change

Getting older



Family history



Things You Can Influence

Previous joint injury



Excess body weight

Years of repeated wear on the joints.



Some people develop osteoarthritis without any obvious risk factors, while others may have several. Having one or more risk factors does not mean you will definitely develop osteoarthritis.

Signs and Symptoms

The signs and symptoms of osteoarthritis can vary from person to person. Some people have mild symptoms that develop slowly over time, while others experience increasing pain and difficulty with daily activities. Symptoms may change from day to day and often become more noticeable as osteoarthritis progresses.

Common signs and symptoms of hip and knee osteoarthritis include:

- Joint pain that is worse with activity and often improves with rest
- Stiffness after waking up or after sitting for a period of time
- Swelling around the joint
- Decreased range of motion
- Pain that may interfere with walking, standing for long periods, or climbing stairs

For people with hip osteoarthritis, pain is commonly felt in the groin but may also spread to the front of the thigh or buttock. As osteoarthritis progresses, pain may occur more often, including while resting or sleeping.



How Is Osteoarthritis Diagnosed?

Diagnosing hip or knee osteoarthritis usually begins with a conversation about your symptoms and a physical examination. Your healthcare provider will ask when your symptoms started, what activities make them better or worse, and how they affect your daily life.

During the physical examination, your provider may evaluate how your joint moves, look for swelling or tenderness, and observe how you walk or perform certain movements. This information helps determine whether osteoarthritis may be the cause of your symptoms.



Imaging, such as X-rays, may be used to help support the diagnosis or evaluate changes within the joint. However, X-ray findings do not always match how much pain or difficulty a person experiences. Some people have significant changes on an X-ray with few symptoms, while others have more pain than their imaging suggests.

An MRI usually isn't needed to diagnose osteoarthritis. Your healthcare provider may order one if they think something else could be causing your symptoms.

In some situations, your healthcare provider may recommend additional testing to help rule out other conditions that can cause joint pain.

Remember:

Your symptoms, physical examination, and imaging all help your provider make a diagnosis.

When Should I Follow Up With My Healthcare Provider?

Pain is interfering with daily activities.

Walking becomes difficult.

Symptoms are getting worse.

Understanding Your Treatment Plan



There is no single treatment that works for everyone with hip or knee osteoarthritis. Your healthcare provider will work with you to develop a treatment plan based on your symptoms, goals, medical history, and personal preferences. As your symptoms change over time, your treatment plan may also change.

Many people benefit from using more than one treatment at the same time. Your treatment plan may include lifestyle changes, weight-loss, regular exercise, physical therapy, medications, assistive devices, injections, or surgery when appropriate. Together, these treatments can help reduce pain, improve movement, and support everyday activities.

Shared decision-making is an important part of osteoarthritis care. You and your healthcare provider should discuss the benefits and risks of available treatment options and choose the approach that best fits your needs and goals.

Common Components of an OA Treatment Plan

- Physical activity and exercise
- Weight management (when appropriate)
- Physical therapy
- Assistive devices or bracing
- Medications
- Injections or other procedures
- Surgery, when appropriate



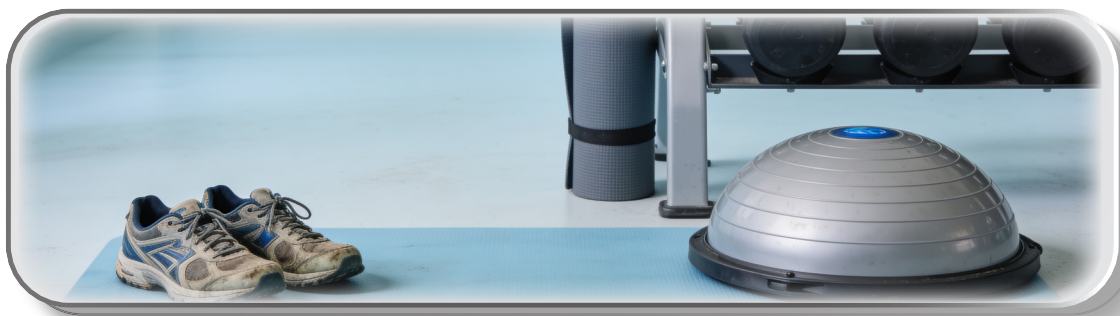
Physical Activity & Exercise

Regular physical activity is one of the most important treatments for hip and knee osteoarthritis. Staying active can help reduce pain, improve joint movement, strengthen the muscles that support your joints, and make everyday activities easier.

The best exercise program is one that fits your abilities, goals, and preferences. Your healthcare provider or physical therapist can help you choose activities that are safe and appropriate for you. You may have some mild discomfort when beginning a new exercise program, but severe or persistent pain should be discussed with your healthcare provider.

Types of exercise that may be recommended include:

- Aerobic activities, such as walking or cycling
- Flexibility and stretching exercises
- Strengthening exercises
- Balance training



The goal is to stay active on a regular basis. Small, consistent amounts of physical activity are often more beneficial than doing too much at one time.

NEAT – Non-Exercise Activity Thermogenesis

It's the calories your body burns during everyday movement that isn't planned exercise, such as:

- Walking to the mailbox
- Taking the stairs
- Gardening
- Housework
- Standing instead of sitting
- Parking farther away
- Carrying groceries
- Playing with children or pets

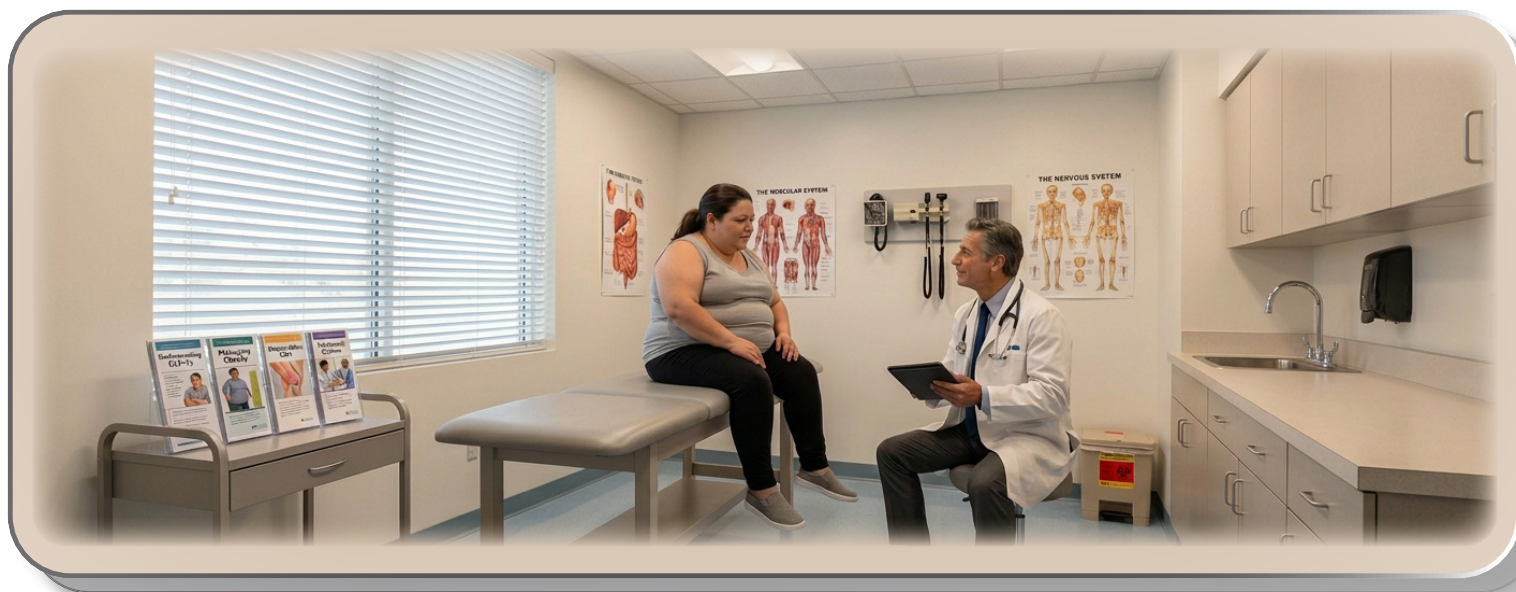


Weight Management

Body weight can affect the amount of force placed on the hip and knee joints during everyday activities. For people who are overweight or have obesity, weight management is one component of a comprehensive treatment plan for osteoarthritis.

Weight management should be individualized and developed through shared decision-making with your healthcare provider. Treatment plans may include healthy eating, physical activity, behavior change strategies, or other interventions based on your individual health needs and treatment goals.

If your healthcare provider recommends weight management as part of your treatment plan, additional information is available in the VA/DoD Clinical Practice Guideline for the Management of Adult Overweight and Obesity and its accompanying patient education materials.

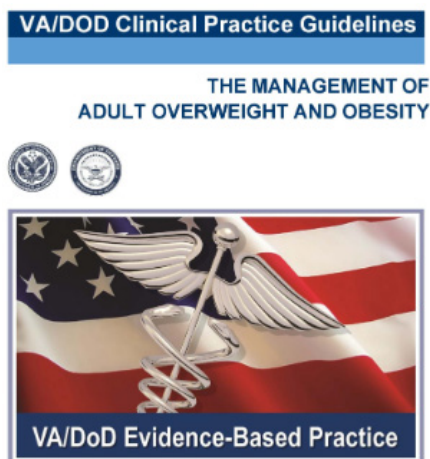


Learn More

The VA/DoD Adult Overweight and Obesity patient education materials provide additional information on:

- Healthy eating
- Physical activity
- Behavior change strategies
- Weight management treatment options

Talk with your healthcare provider if you would like to learn more.



Medications

Medications may help reduce pain and improve your ability to participate in daily activities, physical therapy, and exercise. Your healthcare provider will recommend medications based on your symptoms, overall health, and treatment goals.

Common medications discussed in the VA/DoD Clinical Practice Guideline include:

Medication Type	Purpose
Topical NSAIDs	Help reduce pain by applying medication directly to the affected joint.
Oral NSAIDs	May help reduce pain and inflammation.
Duloxetine	May help reduce chronic osteoarthritis pain in some patients.
Acetaminophen	May be appropriate for some patients when recommended by a healthcare provider.
Intra-articular Corticosteroid Injections	May provide short-term pain relief for some patients.

Not every medication is appropriate for every person. Your healthcare provider will consider your symptoms, other medical conditions, current medications, and personal preferences when recommending treatment.

Before Starting a Medication

Talk with your healthcare provider about:

- Expected benefits
- Possible side effects
- Potential medication interactions
- How long treatment may be needed
- Follow-up and monitoring



Other Treatment Options

Your healthcare provider may recommend additional treatments based on your symptoms, medical history, treatment goals, and response to previous therapies. These treatments are typically considered as part of a comprehensive treatment plan rather than as stand-alone treatments.

Additional treatment options discussed in the VA/DoD Clinical Practice Guideline include:

Treatment	Purpose
Physical Therapy	Improve strength, flexibility, movement, and function.
Assistive Devices	Help reduce stress on affected joints during daily activities.
Bracing	May provide support for selected patients.
Injections	May provide pain relief for some patients.
Dietary Supplements & Nutraceuticals	Some patients ask about supplements; evidence varies among products.
Orthobiologic Therapies	Evidence continues to evolve and may not support routine use.
Complementary & Integrative Health	Some approaches may be discussed as part of an individualized treatment plan.

Every treatment has potential benefits, limitations, and risks. Talk with your healthcare provider about which options may be appropriate for your individual situation.

Shared Decision-Making

Choosing the right treatment involves discussing:

- Your symptoms
- Your treatment goals
- Expected benefits
- Possible risks
- Available evidence
- Cost and availability, when appropriate



When Surgery May Be Considered

Many people with hip or knee osteoarthritis successfully manage their symptoms with non-surgical treatments. However, surgery may become an option when pain, stiffness, and loss of function continue to interfere with daily activities despite appropriate non-surgical care.

If surgery is being considered, your healthcare provider may refer you to an orthopedic surgeon to discuss your treatment options. A surgical consultation gives you the opportunity to learn about the potential benefits, risks, expected recovery, and whether surgery is appropriate for your individual situation.

The decision to have surgery is personal and should be made through shared decision-making with your healthcare team. Your symptoms, overall health, activity level, and treatment goals all play an important role in determining whether surgery is the right choice for you.

You and your healthcare provider may consider a surgical consultation if:

- Pain continues despite appropriate non-surgical treatment.
- Pain interferes with your quality of life.
- Walking or other daily activities become increasingly difficult.
- Conservative treatments are no longer providing adequate relief.
- You are interested in learning whether surgery may be appropriate for you.

Surgery questions to Ask Your Healthcare Provider

- When should surgery be considered?
- What are the expected benefits of surgery?
- What are the possible risks?
- What alternatives are available?
- What can I expect during recovery?
- Should I see an orthopedic surgeon?



Questions for Your Healthcare Team

Preparing questions before your appointment can help you better understand your osteoarthritis and make informed decisions about your care. Consider discussing questions such as:

- ☐ What treatment options are most appropriate for me?
- ☐ What can I do to help reduce my pain and improve my daily activities?
- ☐ Would physical therapy be helpful for me?
- ☐ What type of physical activity or exercise is recommended?
- ☐ Are medications appropriate for my symptoms?
- ☐ Should I consider injections or other treatment options?
- ☐ When should surgery be considered?
- ☐ Are there resources available to help me manage my osteoarthritis?

My Questions

My Notes

My Personal Care Plan

Managing osteoarthritis is an ongoing process. Use this page to record your goals, treatments, and plans discussed with your healthcare team. Bring this guide to future appointments so you can review your progress together.

My Goals

My Current Treatment Plan

- ☐ Physical activity and exercise
- ☐ Weight management
- ☐ Physical therapy
- ☐ Assistive device or brace
- ☐ Medications
- ☐ Injections
- ☐ Surgery consultation
- ☐ Other: _____

What I Will Do Before My Next Appointment

- ☐ Stay physically active.
- ☐ Take my medications as directed.
- ☐ Complete my home exercise program.
- ☐ Record changes in my symptoms.
- ☐ Write down questions for my healthcare provider.
- ☐ Other: _____

My Next Appointment

Date: _____

Provider: _____

Location: _____