

Arthritis

- Arthritis is a general term that refers to over 150 different conditions that affect the muscles, bones and joints
- Knowing the type of arthritis you have means that you can make informed decisions about your healthcare
- You can live well with arthritis by working closely with your healthcare team and by making positive lifestyle changes

Call our National Help Line on 1800 263 265

Arthritis is a general term that refers to over 150 different conditions. The accurate term for this group of conditions is musculoskeletal conditions, as they affect the muscles, bones and/or joints.

Some common types are osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, gout, polymyalgia rheumatica and ankylosing spondylitis.

Anyone can get arthritis, including children and young people. It can affect people from all backgrounds, ages and lifestyles.

Types of arthritis

The different types of musculoskeletal conditions, or conditions that affect the muscles, bones and joints, can be loosely organised into the following groups:

- **inflammatory** – these conditions, which include rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, psoriatic arthritis, juvenile arthritis, gout and ankylosing spondylitis – involve inflammation as one of the main symptoms
- **degenerative** – the main form of degenerative arthritis is osteoarthritis. It involves degeneration or deterioration of the cartilage, bone, ligaments and muscles in and around the joint
- **others** – this is a catch-all for conditions that affect bone or soft tissues, and include fibromyalgia, osteoporosis and back pain.



Your musculoskeletal system

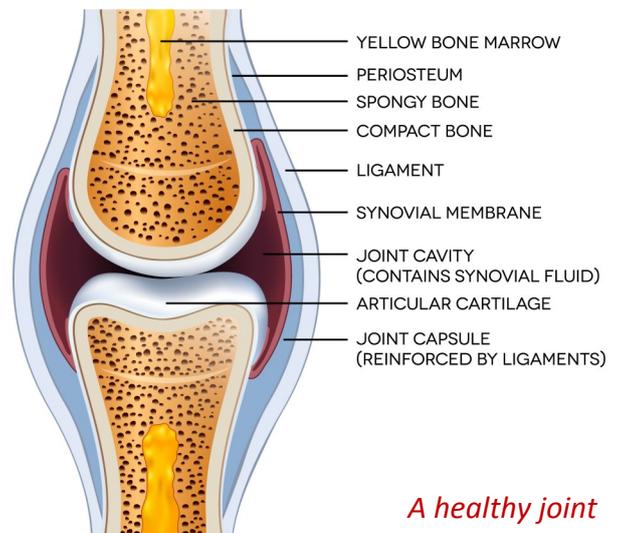
To understand how arthritis and other musculoskeletal conditions work, it's helpful to know a little about the muscles, bones and joints that make up your musculoskeletal system.

Joints are places where bones meet. Bones, muscles, ligaments and tendons all work together so that you can bend, twist, stretch and move about.

The ends of your bones are covered in a thin layer of a smooth tissue called cartilage. It acts like a slippery cushion that helps your joint move smoothly.

Around most of your joints is a joint capsule. This keeps your bones in place. Inside the capsule is a thick fluid which nourishes and lubricates your joint (like oil for a squeaky hinge).

Ligaments hold the joint together by joining one bone to another. Your muscles are attached to the bones by tendons. As your muscles contract, they pull on the bones to make the joint move.



A healthy joint

Produced in partnership with:



Arthritis and other musculoskeletal conditions affect the normal functioning of your joints, muscles, bones and surrounding structures. The way this happens will depend on the condition you have.

Symptoms

Arthritis affects people in different ways and each condition will have specific symptoms, however common symptoms are:

- pain
- swelling, redness and warmth in a joint
- muscular aches and pains
- stiffness or reduced movement of a joint
- general symptoms such as fatigue and feeling unwell.

Sometimes, these symptoms are called ‘rheumatism’. Rheumatism isn’t a disorder in itself, but the word is occasionally used to describe any sort of joint or muscle pain.

Diagnosis

If you think you have a type of arthritis, and have been experiencing joint or muscle pain, it’s important that you discuss your symptoms with your doctor. Getting a diagnosis as soon as possible means that treatment can start quickly. Early treatment will give you the best possible outcomes.

Having a correct diagnosis will mean you get the most appropriate care, as treatment, especially medication, can differ a lot depending on the type of arthritis you have.

Because there are so many types of arthritis, your doctor may do a number of exams and tests to diagnose which one you have including:

- **medical history** – this will include finding out about your symptoms, your family history, other health problems you’ve experienced in the past
- **physical examination** – your doctor will look for redness and swelling in and around the joint, and will check out the range of movement of your joints. Depending on the type of arthritis your doctor thinks you may have, they may also look for rashes, check your eyes and throat, measure your temperature

- **scans and other tests**—again, depending on the type of arthritis your doctor thinks you have, you may have blood tests to check for levels of inflammation in your blood or specific genetic markers. You may also have scans such as x-rays, ultrasound, CT or MRI to get a clearer picture of what’s happening inside your joints
- **referral to a specialist** - if appropriate your doctor will refer you to a specialist, often a rheumatologist, for diagnosis and specialised management of your condition.

Treatment

Living with arthritis can be different from person to person, and symptoms can vary from day-to-day. Treatment and management options will vary depending on the type of arthritis you have, its severity and the parts of the body affected.

There is no cure for arthritis. Management options can include medical treatment and medication, physiotherapy, exercise and self-management techniques.

Your arthritis healthcare team

A range of health professionals are able to help you manage your arthritis. These may include:

- your general practitioner (GP)
- rheumatologist
- physiotherapist
- dietitian
- occupational therapist
- exercise physiologist
- podiatrist
- pharmacist
- nurse
- psychologist.

Medication for arthritis

Different types of arthritis are treated by different medications.

Some arthritis medications aim to reduce pain and inflammation. Others work on the disease process itself and aim to slow down, or stop damage to the joints. The medications your doctor prescribes will depend on your type of arthritis and the severity of your symptoms.



You should let your doctor know about any other medications or treatments you're taking - even if you've purchased them from a supermarket, health store or complementary therapist (e.g. naturopath, homeopath).

The most common types of medications used to treat arthritis include:

- **pain relievers (or analgesics)** – e.g. paracetamol - for temporary pain relief
- **non-steroidal anti-inflammatories (NSAIDs)** – e.g. ibuprofen - to control inflammation and provide pain relief
- **corticosteroids** – e.g. prednisolone - to quickly control or reduce inflammation
- **disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARDs)** – e.g. methotrexate - control your overactive immune system
- **biologics and biosimilars (bDMARDs)** – e.g. infliximab – are biological disease-modifying drugs that work to control your immune system, but in a much more targeted way.

Self-management

There are many things you can do to manage your arthritis including:

Learn about your condition – what type of arthritis or musculoskeletal condition do you have? What are the treatment options? What can you expect in the future? Knowing as much as possible about your condition means that you can make informed decisions about your healthcare and play an active role in the management of your condition.

Stay active - physical activity is the key to maintaining muscle strength, joint flexibility and managing your pain. A physiotherapist or exercise physiologist can help design an individual program for you. This can be arranged by your doctor on a GP Management Plan as part of managing chronic illness.

Learn ways to manage pain - there are many strategies you can use to deal with pain. Knowing about these different strategies and what works best for you is an important part of living with a chronic condition such as arthritis.

Watch your diet - while there's no diet that can cure arthritis, a healthy and well-balanced diet is the best for general good health. Keeping to a healthy weight is also important as any extra weight puts added strain on your joints, especially load bearing joints such as your hips, knee and ankles.

Work closely with your healthcare team - the best way to live well with arthritis is by working closely with all the practitioners who make up your healthcare team.

Protect your joints - find out about aids, equipment and gadgets that can make tasks easier. An occupational therapist can give you advice on aids, equipment and home modifications. The Independent Living Centre can also be a very useful contact for information and advice.

Stay at work or at school – they're both good for your health and wellbeing. Talk to your doctor or allied healthcare professional about ways to help you stay at work or school or get back to work or school.

Support from others – contact us for information about support group locations and contact details.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Rheumatologist
- Physiotherapist
- Exercise physiologist
- Medicines Line
- Independent Living Centre
- *MOVE muscle, bone & joint health*
National Help Line Tel: 1800 263 265

Things to remember

- Arthritis is a general term that refers to over 150 different conditions that affect the muscles, bones and joints
- Knowing the type of arthritis you have means that you can make informed decisions about your healthcare
- You can live well with arthritis by working closely with your healthcare team and by making positive lifestyle changes



The whole or part of this material is copyright to the State of Victoria and the Better Health Channel. Reproduced with permission of the Victorian Minister for Health. Users are permitted to print copies for research, study or educational purposes.

Information has been produced in consultation with and approved by: MOVE muscle, bone & joint health Ltd.

How we can help

Call our National Help Line and speak to our nurses
Phone 1800 263 265 or email helpline@move.org.au

Visit our website move.org.au for information on:

- muscle, bone and joint conditions
- ways to live well with a muscle, bone and joint condition
- our new resource *Managing your pain: An A-Z guide*
- programs and services
- peer support groups
- upcoming webinars, seminars and other events.

More to explore

- **Australian Physiotherapy Association**
www.physiotherapy.asn.au
- **Exercise and Sports Science Australia**
www.essa.org.au
- **Independent Living Centre**
<http://ilcaustralia.org.au>
Tel. (03) 9362 6111
- **Medicines Line**
www.nps.org.au
Tel. 1300 MEDICINE (1300 633 424)
- **Arthritis Research UK**
www.arthritisresearchuk.org
- **Arthritis Foundation (USA)**
www.arthritis.org
- **Better Health Channel**
www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

July 2017