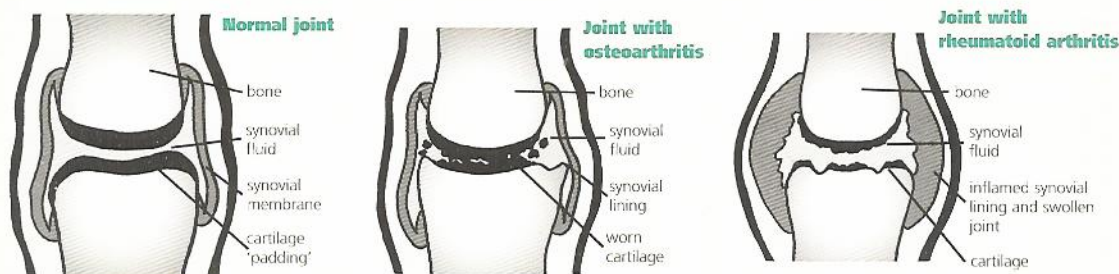


# ARTHRITIS

The word 'arthritis' means inflammation of the joint, although in some forms of arthritis there is little or no inflammation. There are more than 150 different types of arthritis, affecting one in three Australians.

The most common forms are osteo and rheumatoid arthritis.



Our joints allow our bones to move smoothly against each other. For example, when you walk your knee and hip joints let you move freely. In arthritis, joints may wear down, deform or become unstable, causing pain and stopping them from moving freely and smoothly.

## Signs and symptoms

These can include:

- Stiff joints when getting out of bed or after sitting for a long time
- Recurring pain or tenderness in any joint
- Swelling in one or more joints
- Limited joint movement
- Redness and warmth in a joint
- Unexplained weight loss, fever or weakness with joint pain.

## Osteoarthritis

Osteoarthritis is the most common form of arthritis. It usually occurs later in life and in people who have injured or put extra strain on their joints, e.g. sports people. Wear and tear causes the cartilage of the joint to break down (see diagrams). This makes the joints

stiff and painful, although generally there is little or no inflammation. Osteoarthritis is more likely to affect the weight-bearing joints – hips, knees, spine and hands.

Osteoarthritis is different to osteoporosis, a condition where the bones become brittle and more likely to break (see *Osteoporosis* Fact Card).

## Rheumatoid arthritis

In this condition, the lining of the joint becomes inflamed (see diagram). Joints often affected are those in the fingers, wrists, shoulders, knees or feet with both sides of the body affected similarly. Other body tissues may also become inflamed. This can cause tiredness and aching muscles. Proper treatment is essential to reduce the joint damage rheumatoid arthritis can cause.

## Important

Different forms of arthritis need different medicines so see your doctor as soon as you get any symptoms.

## Self Care

### Exercise

- Exercise on land and in warm water (hydrotherapy) is very beneficial for pain management and in improving joint strength and mobility.
- Ask a physiotherapist for an exercise plan to improve your joint flexibility and muscle strength.

### Heat and cold

- A hot shower or bath can bring some relief by relaxing muscles. Applying heat and ice packs to the area can also reduce pain. Your physiotherapist or doctor can suggest other ways to help manage pain.

### Physical aids

- A pharmacist, an 'Independent Living Centre' or occupational therapist can advise on many 'joint saving' devices you can use.

### Balance exercise with rest

- During flare-ups you will need more rest and less exercise (of the affected joint/s), and vice versa when you improve.

### Protect your joints

- Use large joints where possible to do a task, e.g. use your whole arm instead of your hand to push open a door.

### Distribute weight

- Use two joints instead of one, e.g. use both arms to carry a book.
- Wear supportive and well-cushioned shoes.
- Try not to sit, stand or lie in one position for too long.
- Slide or wheel objects instead of lifting them.
- Keep at your ideal weight (see *Weight and Health and Nutrition* fact cards).

### Share your concerns with others

- Talk to people who have arthritis – find out how they cope.
- Talk to or join the Arthritis Foundation in your state. They provide the Arthritis Self Management Course which offers practical and well-tested ways of coping.

Your **Self Care** Pharmacist

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## Medicines

Medicines can relieve symptoms, control pain, slow down damage to joints and reduce disability.

- Pain relievers (e.g. paracetamol) decrease the pain.
- NSAIDs (e.g. ibuprofen) help reduce pain, redness, stiffness and swelling (see *Pain Relievers* Fact Card).
- Many pain relievers work best if taken regularly, not just when pain gets really bad. Talk to your doctor and pharmacist about the best way to take pain relievers.
- Your doctor may prescribe other medicines (e.g. tablets, injections) to slow down the damage to your joints.
- Some medicines (e.g. cold, sinus or allergy products) may contain the same pain relieving medicine that you already take for arthritis. Always check with your pharmacist first before purchasing these products.

### Further Reading:

Lorig, K and Fries, J  
*The Arthritis Helpbook (4th edition)*  
Available from the Arthritis foundation in your state. Your local Arthritis Foundation also has books, videos and other resources for borrowing or purchase.

### Other relevant fact cards:

- *Weight and Health*
- *Osteoporosis*
- *Exercises for Flexibility*
- *Pain Relievers*
- *Nutrition fact cards*

### Contact:

**Your doctor** – listed under medical practitioners in the yellow pages of the phone book.

**Arthritis Foundation in your state or territory** – listed under 'A' in your capital city phone book or [www.arthritisfoundation.com.au](http://www.arthritisfoundation.com.au)

**A physiotherapist** – at your nearest public hospital, local community health centre or look in the yellow pages of the phone book.

For information and advice about devices:

**Independent Living Centre** – listed under 'I' in the white pages of your capital city phone book.

**Your Self Care pharmacist.** To find: (02) 6283 4777

In case of poisoning, phone the **Poisons Information Centre** on 131 126 from anywhere in Australia.

Pharmacists are medicines experts. Ask your pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.

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