

OSTEOARTHRITIS

A Brief Guide for People in Scotland



What is Osteoarthritis?

Osteoarthritis (OA) is a common and complex problem that can cause pain, stiffness and swelling in many joints. However, the hips, knees or hand joints are most frequently affected. You can find a short film about OA by clicking on the image below:



It is more common in people aged 45 years or over, but it can affect younger people too.

We don't know what the exact cause of osteoarthritis is.

Many factors affect osteoarthritis such as your genetics, other medical problems you may have, and the type of job or sport you do. Having a previous injury or being overweight can also be a factor.

OA can be a long-term condition but that doesn't mean it will get worse over time.

We know that people's experiences of osteoarthritis symptoms can change over time

We know that only a small number of people with osteoarthritis will ever need surgery.

Healthcare professionals can help

Healthcare professionals can discuss with you the best ways to be active.

We can help you with advice on the use of insoles, braces and aids and advise on any adaptations that you may need at home.

We can advise you about appropriate pain control, such as rub-on creams containing non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs).

We can discuss ways to support you with weight loss if needed.



Where can I go for help?

Apart from GPs and orthopaedic specialists there are other health professionals who can advise about joint pain and its management e.g pharmacists, podiatrists, occupational therapist and practice nurses.

In Scotland, many practices employ Advanced Physiotherapist Practitioners who are highly skilled in treating and caring for people with osteoarthritis.

Health professionals can diagnose OA by looking for certain signs and symptoms and ruling out other musculoskeletal conditions.

X-rays of joints are not always needed in the diagnosis and management of OA and are only useful if you need surgery.

Most people's joint pain can be managed in general practice and you won't need to be referred to an orthopaedic surgeon unless you have severe pain, and you have tried all other non-surgical options.

However, if symptoms worsen or new ones arise then you should seek medical advice.



Photo courtesy of The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy

Can I do anything to help my OA?

Research has shown us that keeping active and doing the things you enjoy helps reduce the pain and stiffness in your joints.

We know that losing weight is really difficult. Health professionals can discuss options with you to help. Even a small loss in weight can result in less strain on your joints, especially on your knees.

Using rub on anti-inflammatory creams can make physical activity more comfortable.

Check out all the useful online resources on page 4 that will help you get started and to keep going.



Physical activity

Both general physical activity and specific exercises for joints can have immediate and long-term benefits.

Build up slowly and take rests when needed, but try to be physically active every day and progress your activity.

If you normally exercise regularly then keep it going. Pain when exercising is not necessarily an indicator that a joint is being damaged.

Physical activity is not only essential for managing osteoarthritis, but it can help with other health problems such as type 2 diabetes, heart and lung disease. More importantly, regular physical activity can help to improve your quality of life.



Other ways you can help yourself

There are other ways to manage joint pain and stiffness, such as applying warmth, and practising relaxation and distraction. Many people try complementary therapies that can be helpful and different approaches can be combined.

There are many special gadgets to help with everyday tasks. Before buying take independent advice, and try out equipment to make sure it is suitable.

Feeling down and frustrated is a natural and understandable reaction to experiencing pain and stiffness which can make it hard to get out and about, socialise and do your usual activities.

Continuing with social activities and hobbies is important for staying positive, which in turn makes it easier to cope with symptoms of osteoarthritis.



Everyone will have a different experience of OA...

Some people will have..



..only minor symptoms.

Using rub-on creams can..



..reduce the need for drugs.

OA can come and go, and..



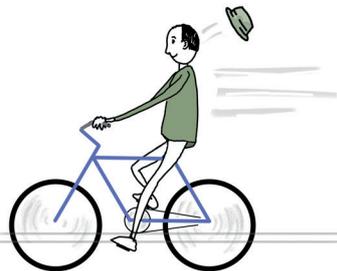
..very few will require surgery.

X-rays are NOT usually..



..needed for a diagnosis.

It's a long term condition..



..helped by physical activity.

Find an activity...



..that you can enjoy.

And weight loss...



..will help too.

Yoga and swimming...



..can also be helpful.

Remember that you are the most important person in managing your OA!

Here are some links you may find useful:

Versus Arthritis Scotland provide information and support via [their website](#)

You can also find more detailed information about OA on the **JIGSAW-E** website. Access their OA Guidebook [here](#)



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