

## How to Help Prevent Osteoarthritis



Arthritis is a condition that causes pain and swelling (inflammation) in your joints. There are more than 100 forms of arthritis and related diseases. A joint is a place in the body where two bones meet. Arthritis may also affect other body tissue near the joints. This includes muscles, tendons, and ligaments. Some forms of arthritis cause symptoms throughout the body.

Osteoarthritis (OA) is one of the most common types of arthritis. It's sometimes called degenerative joint disease or wear-and-tear arthritis. In OA, the cartilage in your joints wears away. Cartilage covers the ends of bones. It acts as a cushion. Bone rubs against bone if too much cartilage wears away. The joint changes and inflammation in OA cause pain, stiffness, and trouble with movement. OA most commonly affects the knees, hips, hands, and spine.

### Can you prevent OA?

OA is a result of using your joints every day. The older a person gets, the more wear-and-tear happens. You may not be able to fully prevent OA. But a healthy lifestyle may help your overall health and the health of your joints. It is important to maintain a healthy weight, control blood sugar, exercise, and protect joints from injury. This may make it less likely that OA will develop. These things can also help OA from getting worse.

### Keep a healthy body weight

Extra weight puts stress on your joints. It can most hurt your hips, knees, ankles, and feet. Fat tissue also makes proteins that cause swelling in the joints and changes in the cartilage. Talk with your healthcare provider about safe ways to lose weight if you are overweight.

### Control your blood sugar

High blood sugar levels raise your risk of getting OA. Get your blood sugar levels checked regularly if you have diabetes. Talk with your healthcare provider about ways to manage your levels if they are too high.

### Be active every day



Exercise is a good way to prevent joint problems. It helps to keep joints from getting stiff. It keeps muscles strong. It's also an important part of treating arthritis. Try to get at least 30 minutes of exercise on most days. Talk with your healthcare provider about safe exercise for you.

You can also try the Arthritis Foundation's Walk With Ease [program](#). For more information or to find a Walk With Ease Class in your area, contact the Arthritis Foundation Helpline at 800-283-7800.

## Prevent injury to your joints

Joint injuries increase your risk of getting OA. Start slowly and work up to your goal when you exercise. Each time you exercise, take 5 to 10 minutes to warm up with gentle movements. This helps to prevent injuries to muscles, joints, ligaments, and tendons.

Think about changing your exercises and activities each day. You will use different parts of your body. This will help prevent stress to the same joints every day.

Be careful with your daily activities. Some activities put extra stress on joints. For instance, carry heavy bags of groceries close to your body in the crook of your arm instead of holding them with your hands.

Use exercise equipment and protective gear as instructed. Make sure your safety gear is comfortable and fits well.

## Pay attention to pain

You may have done too much if you have joint pain that lasts 1 to 2 hours after activity or exercise. Do less next time. Take more breaks. Rest the joint. Use an ice pack to relieve pain. Call your healthcare provider if it does not get better with time.

Consider getting an assessment by a physical therapist to learn the best exercises to protect your joints.

Talk with your healthcare provider about using ice packs and pain medicine before and after you exercise.

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