

ARTHRITIS

What is arthritis?

If you feel pain and stiffness in your body or have trouble moving around, you might have arthritis. Any disorder that affects the joints is often called arthritis. Joints are places where two bones meet, such as your elbow or knee.

Most types of arthritis can cause joint pain and inflammation (swelling). Over time, a swollen joint can become severely damaged. Some kinds of arthritis can also cause problems in your organs, such as your eyes or skin. Treatment will depend on the type of arthritis you have.

What are the types of arthritis?

Common types of arthritis include:

- **Osteoarthritis** is the most common type of arthritis. It's often related to aging or injury.
- **Autoimmune arthritis** happens when your body's immune system attacks healthy cells in your body by mistake. **Rheumatoid arthritis** is the most common form of this type of arthritis.
- **Juvenile arthritis** is a type of arthritis that happens in children.
- **Infectious arthritis** is an infection that has spread from another part of your body to the joint. Reactive arthritis is one type.
- **Psoriatic arthritis** affects people with **psoriasis** (itchy or sore scaly red and white skin patches).
- **Gout** is a painful type of arthritis that happens when too much uric acid builds up in your body. It often starts in the big toe. Other joints can also be affected.
- **Ankylosing spondylitis** is a type of arthritis of the spine that can cause stiffness and make it difficult to move and bend.

What are the symptoms of arthritis?

The most common arthritis symptoms and signs include:

- **Joint pain.**
- Stiffness or reduced range of motion (how far you can move a joint).
- **Swelling (inflammation).**
- Skin discoloration.
- Tenderness or sensitivity to touch around a joint.
- A feeling of heat or warmth near your joints.

Where you experience symptoms depends on which type of arthritis you have, and which of your joints it affects.

Some types of arthritis cause symptoms in waves that come and go called flares or flare-ups. Others make your joints feel painful or stiff all the time, or after being physically active.

Pain, redness, warmth, and joint inflammation are common arthritis symptoms. You may not be able to move your joint as well as it should. Other symptoms could include [fever](#), weight loss, breathing difficulties, or a rash.

Symptoms often get worse as you age. Some symptoms of arthritis may be signs of other illnesses.

Who is more likely to get arthritis?

A few things that might increase your chance of getting arthritis include:

- **Family history.** You may be more likely to get certain types of arthritis if a member of your family has the disorder.
- **Age.** The risk of getting many types of arthritis increases with age.
- **Sex.** Certain types of arthritis are more common in women, while other types are more common in men.

Other factors that might increase your risk of getting arthritis include having a previous joint injury, [obesity](#), or [lupus](#).

How is arthritis diagnosed?

To find out if you have arthritis, your health care provider may:

- Ask you about your medical history, including your symptoms.
- Do a physical exam.
- Order blood tests or take [x-rays](#).

Your provider may refer you to a rheumatologist (a doctor who specializes in arthritis care) for tests, diagnosis, and care.

What are the treatments for arthritis?

Treatment depends on the type of arthritis you have. It may include medicine or surgery. Your provider will work with you to improve your symptoms and quality of life.

A few ways to help manage your symptoms include:

- Hot or cold packs
- Relaxation techniques
- Use of splints, braces, and/or [assistive devices](#)
- There's no cure for arthritis, but your healthcare provider will help you find treatments that manage your symptoms. Which treatments you'll need depend on what's causing the arthritis, which type you have and which joints it affects.
- The most common arthritis treatments include:
- Over-the-counter (OTC) anti-inflammatory medicine like [NSAIDs](#) or acetaminophen.

- [Corticosteroids](#) (prescription anti-inflammatory medicine, including [cortisone shots](#)).
- [Disease-modifying antirheumatic drugs \(DMARDs\)](#) if you have rheumatoid or psoriatic arthritis.
- [Physical therapy](#) or [occupational therapy](#) can help you improve your strength, range of motion and confidence while you're moving.
- Surgery (usually only if nonsurgical treatments don't relieve your symptoms).
- **Arthritis surgery**
- You may need surgery if you have severe arthritis and other treatments don't work. The two most common types of arthritis surgery are joint fusion and joint replacement.
- Joint fusion is exactly what it sounds like: surgically joining bones together. It's most common for bones in your spine ([spinal fusion](#)) or your ankle ([ankle fusion](#)).
- If your joints are damaged or you've experienced bone loss, you might need an [arthroplasty \(joint replacement\)](#). Your surgeon will remove your damaged natural joint and replace it with a prosthesis (artificial joint). You might need a partial or total joint replacement.
- Your provider or surgeon will tell you which type of surgery you'll need and what to expect.

Do natural remedies work for arthritis?

home remedies and lifestyle changes can help treat arthritis symptoms. However, they should not replace medical treatment.

There is little scientific evidence to suggest that some natural remedies are effective. In addition, some remedies, such as herbal supplements, are not regulated in the same way as prescription medications.

People should consider seeing a doctor before trying a natural remedy for arthritis. This ensures that the remedy is safe and will not interfere with other types of arthritis treatment.

Physical Activity

physical activity can improve the quality of life for those with arthritis. They suggest that the following forms of exercise are safe for most adults:

- swimming
- walking
- biking
- tai chi
- other water activities, such as aqua jogging and water aerobics

The pain of arthritis may cause people to avoid moving the affected joints. Over time, however, inactivity has a negative impact on the joints, which can lead to muscular atrophy and loss of ligament range of motion.

Exercising in water is a gentle way to move the impacted joint and maintain muscle strength. Swimming provides gentle resistance while still being easy on the joints due to the decreased effect of gravity on the body's movements.

Swimming [can also](#):

- stimulate blood circulation
- improve joint flexibility
- reduce pain
- ease muscle stiffness
- build strength and improve cardiovascular fitness

Yoga

For those with arthritis, [yoga](#) [can help](#) to:

- improve physical function
- improve flexibility and range of motion
- help people to relax

The following tips may be helpful:

- Begin with a gentle yoga or flow class that allows participants to move through poses in short amounts of time.
- Speak with the instructor beforehand, if possible, to let them know about the condition.
- Try to practice yoga later in the day when joints are looser.

People with RA should speak with a healthcare professional about whether to practice yoga during a flare-up.

Physical therapy

The goal of physical therapy is to improve flexibility, range of motion, strength, and the ability to use an injured joint.

The [Arthritis Foundation \(AF\)](#) says a physical therapist designs an exercise program to help:

- improve the joints' mobility
- increase strength
- maintain fitness
- a person maintain their ability to perform daily activities

Hot or cold therapy

Heat therapy can help to soothe aching muscles and loosen stiff joints. It expands the blood vessels, increasing the amount of blood and oxygen that flows to an injured area. More blood flow results in a looser, less painful joint.

However, people should avoid using heat therapy if they are experiencing a flare. If a person is experiencing a sudden onset of swelling, cold therapy may be preferable as it decreases inflammation and blood flow.

People can alternate between [hot and cold therapy](#) to ease joint pain. If they do this, they should leave a few hours between each session.

For heat therapy, a person can try a warm, steamy shower or bath or use a heating pad for [20 minutes](#) at a time.

Massage

Massage can lessen the pain of arthritis. massage lowers cortisol levels, increases the mood-lifting hormone serotonin, and lowers [blood pressure](#).

A group of 222 participants underwent weekly Swedish massage, light touch, or their standard care for 8 weeks. Standard care consisted of the participants' regular care routine for osteoarthritis.

Eight weeks of Swedish massage showed significant improvement in symptoms. Pain and stiffness lessened, alongside an improvement in joint function.

Topical gels

[Voltaren gel](#) and [capsaicin creams](#) are examples of topical treatments that are available from pharmacies.

[VersusArthritis](#) notes that capsaicin comes from chili peppers and decreases substance P, which is a pain transmitter in the nerves. A person may experience a mild burning sensation when applying it to the skin. However, tissue damage is not the cause of the sensation.

Voltaren is a topical [nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug \(NSAID\)](#) or anti-inflammatory pain reliever.

Acupuncture

Acupuncture is a form of traditional Chinese medicine.

During a treatment session, an acupuncture practitioner inserts thin stainless-steel needles into specific points on the body to help relieve a range of symptoms.

Mindfulness meditation

Mindfulness [meditation](#) involves training the mind to pay nonjudgmental attention to thoughts, emotions, and feelings in the body. This may reduce the pain that results from chronic symptoms.

A [2018 study](#)[Trusted Source](#) associates mindfulness meditation with lower pain sensitivity. It also notes that it may be effective for individuals who do not have any experience in meditation.

Omega-3 fatty acids

Omega-3s are a type of essential fatty acid. They are available in [fish oil](#) supplements and also in vegetarian forms. When someone takes omega-3s, the body converts them into an anti-inflammatory.

A [2020 review](#)^{Trusted Source} of studies of individuals with RA found that supplementation with omega-3s results in significant decreases in joint pain when compared with control groups.

Herbal remedies

Before taking herbal remedies, people should consult a healthcare professional. This is because they can cause side effects and interact with other medications.

However, a person may wish to try:

- **Turmeric:** A [2022 systematic review and meta-analysis](#) found that curcumin extract can improve the symptoms and reduce inflammation in those with arthritis.
- **Ginger:** A [randomized controlled trial in 2019](#)^{Trusted Source} found that ginger can help to reduce inflammation in those with RA.
- **Boswellia serrata:** A [systematic review and meta-analysis from 2020](#)^{Trusted Source} finds that Boswellia extract may be a safe and effective treatment option for OA. The researchers note that a person should take the extract for 4 weeks.
- **Willow bark extract:** This [contains](#) an active ingredient called salicin, which may be able to treat pain in those with arthritis. The current research is limited, however.

People can take herbal remedies in the following ways:

- pills and capsules
- teas
- infusions
- topical products
- extracts

A person can also use herbal remedies such as ginger and turmeric in their cooking.

What lifestyle changes can help?

Alongside exercise, a person can follow a [balanced diet](#) to achieve and maintain a healthy BMI as this can lower pressure on the joints.

The [AF](#) reports that the pressure on joints is about one-and-a-half times a person's [body weight](#) with every step on a flat surface. In people with arthritis, that increases to about four times an individual's body weight.

A 5 pound (lb) reduction in body weight can reduce the stress on a person's joints by about 20 lb. This could result in significant pain reduction and help to preserve the remaining joint cartilage.

The [AF](#) also provides some tips that may help individuals manage their arthritis:

- resting when the joints are swollen or in pain
- improving sleep patterns
- keeping track of medications and any side effects they might cause
- managing fatigue, such as staying hydrated

Home remedy side effects

Depending on the remedy, side effects can occur. For example, the [NHS](#) states that some people may experience pain, dizziness, drowsiness, or bleeding when undergoing acupuncture. However, this is rare and temporary.

Herbal supplements can also lead to side effects. For example, the [AF](#) says doctors may not recommend [ginger](#) and chamomile for those who take [warfarin](#). This is because they may interact with the medication and increase bleeding risk.

For heat therapy, people should avoid applying hot water bottles directly to the skin or filling them with boiling water. They should also avoid lying or sleeping on heat packs or heating pads, as these can cause burns.