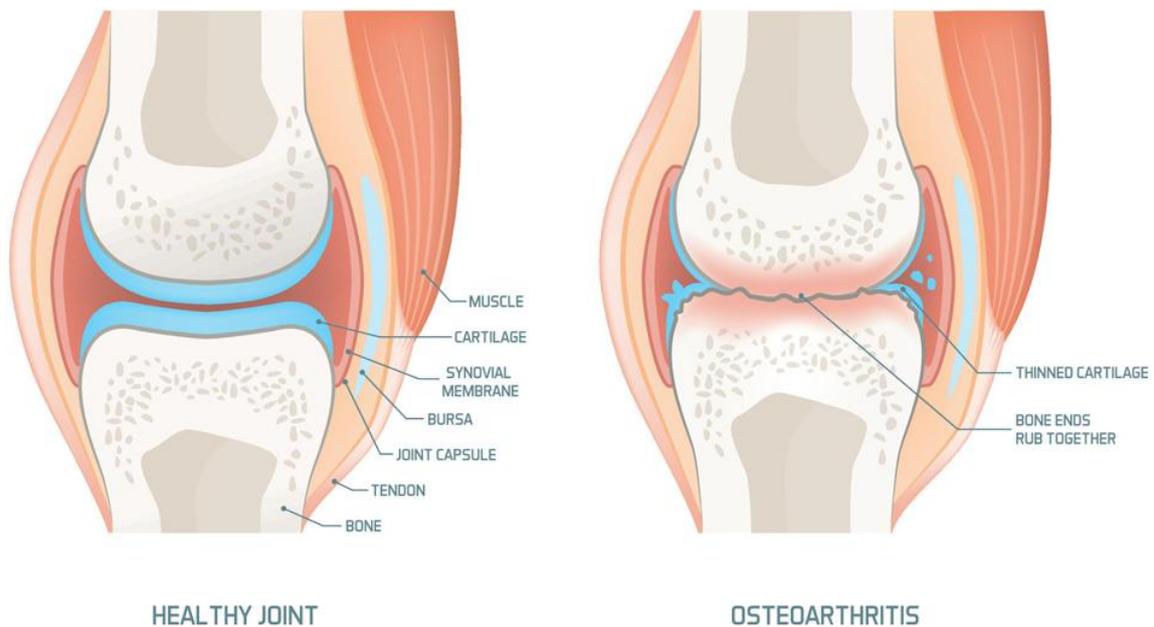


Osteoarthritis (OA)



What is Osteoarthritis?

Osteoarthritis (OA) is the most common type of arthritis. It is a **long-term joint condition** where the joint structures (including cartilage, bone, and surrounding tissues) gradually change over time.

It can affect any joint, but most commonly involves the **knees, hips, hands, spine, and feet**.

What Causes Osteoarthritis?

Osteoarthritis develops due to a combination of factors, including:

- Ageing
- Previous joint injury or surgery
- Repetitive strain or heavy joint loading
- Being overweight (especially for hip and knee joints)
- Muscle weakness around the joint
- Family history

Osteoarthritis is **not simply “wear and tear”**, but a condition involving the whole joint.

Common Symptoms

Symptoms often develop gradually and may vary from day to day.

- Joint pain (worse with activity, relieved by rest)
 - Stiffness, especially after rest or in the morning (usually < 30 minutes)
 - Reduced movement or flexibility
 - Swelling or tenderness
 - Grinding or clicking sensation
 - Weakness around the joint
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How is Osteoarthritis Diagnosed?

Diagnosis is usually based on:

- Your symptoms and medical history
- Physical examination

X-rays or scans are **not always needed**, as symptoms do not always match imaging findings.

How is Osteoarthritis Managed?

There is no cure, but symptoms can be **very effectively managed**.

Key Treatments

- Education and self-management

- Exercise (most important treatment)
 - Weight management (if applicable)
 - Pain relief medication (if needed)
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Role of Physiotherapy

Physiotherapy helps by:

- Improving joint movement
- Strengthening muscles that support the joint
- Reducing pain and stiffness
- Improving balance and function

Your physiotherapist will design an exercise programme tailored to you.

Exercise and Activity

Regular physical activity is strongly recommended:

- Strengthening exercises
- Stretching and mobility exercises
- Walking, swimming, cycling, or gym-based exercise

Exercise is safe for osteoarthritis and helps protect joints.

Pain Management Options

- Paracetamol or topical anti-inflammatory gels
- Heat or cold packs
- Activity pacing and rest breaks
- Joint supports if advised

Always follow medical advice regarding medication.

Things That Can Help

- Maintain a healthy weight

- Stay active but pace activities
 - Use supportive footwear
 - Modify activities rather than stopping them
 - Manage flare-ups with temporary rest and gentle movement
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Flare-Ups

Flare-ups are periods of increased pain or stiffness.

During a flare-up:

- Reduce activity temporarily
- Continue gentle movement
- Use pain relief strategies

Seek advice if flare-ups are frequent or severe.

When to Seek Medical Advice

Contact your GP or healthcare professional if:

- Pain is worsening or not controlled
 - The joint becomes very swollen, red, or hot
 - Symptoms are affecting sleep or daily life
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Key Points to Remember

- Osteoarthritis is common and manageable
 - Exercise is the most effective treatment
 - Staying active helps reduce pain and improve function
 - Physiotherapy plays a key role
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