

Living with Osteoarthritis

HOW EXERCISES EASE SYMPTOMS OF OSTEOARTHRITIS

- #### 1 Range of motion/flexibility

Gentle stretching and movements that takes joints to their full range. Improving flexibility of joints will reduce stiness and help keep joints moving


- #### 2 Balance Exercises

Helps trengthen small muscles around knrees and ankles to help prevent falls


- #### 3 Strength Training

Help to build muscles around the affected joints. This provide more support and protection which helps ease the stress on the painful joint.


- #### 4 Aquatic Exercises

Exercises performed in water helps relieve pressure of your body weight on the affected joints, whilst providing resistance to strengthen muscles


- #### 5 Aerobic Exercises

Walking, jogging, bicycling are all great aerobic exercises. Reduces fatigues, build stamina, controls weight and strengthens heart and lungs.



What is osteoarthritis?

Osteoarthritis (OA) is the most common type of arthritis. It is a long-term condition that affects the joints, causing pain, stiffness, and reduced movement. It commonly affects the knees, hips, hands, spine, and feet.

In osteoarthritis, the smooth cartilage that covers the ends of bones becomes thinner and rougher. The joint may not move as easily as before, and surrounding tissues can also become irritated.

Common symptoms

Symptoms can vary from person to person and may change over time. Common symptoms include:

- Joint pain, especially with movement or after activity
- Stiffness, particularly in the morning or after resting
- Swelling around the joint
- Reduced movement or flexibility
- Grinding or cracking sensations (crepitus)
- Weakness in the muscles around the joint

Symptoms often develop gradually and may flare up at times.

What causes osteoarthritis?

Osteoarthritis develops due to a combination of factors, including:

- Ageing
- Previous joint injury or surgery
- Repetitive strain or heavy physical work
- Being overweight or obese
- Family history of osteoarthritis
- Weak muscles around the joint

Osteoarthritis is not simply 'wear and tear' and does not mean joints are being damaged by everyday activity.

How is osteoarthritis diagnosed?

Diagnosis is usually based on:

- Your symptoms and how they affect daily life
- Physical examination of the joint
- X-rays (sometimes used, but not always necessary)

Scans and blood tests are not routinely required unless another condition is suspected.

Managing osteoarthritis

Although there is no cure, many people manage osteoarthritis well with the right approach. Treatment focuses on reducing pain, improving movement, and maintaining independence.

Exercise and physical activity

Exercise is one of the most effective treatments for osteoarthritis.

- Strengthening exercises support and protect joints
- Stretching helps reduce stiffness
- Aerobic activity (such as walking, cycling, or swimming) improves general fitness and pain control

A physiotherapist can provide a personalised exercise programme.

Weight management

If you are overweight, losing even a small amount of weight can significantly reduce joint pain, especially in the hips and knees.

Pain relief

Pain relief may include:

- Simple painkillers such as paracetamol
- Topical anti-inflammatory gels or creams
- Oral anti-inflammatory medicines (only if appropriate and advised by a healthcare professional)

Always discuss medication use with your GP or pharmacist.

Joint protection and pacing

- Break tasks into manageable chunks
- Alternate activity with rest
- Use supportive footwear and walking aids if needed
- Modify activities rather than avoiding them completely

Heat and cold

- Heat (such as warm packs) can help with stiffness
- Cold packs may reduce swelling after activity

Do I need surgery?

Most people with osteoarthritis do not need surgery. Joint replacement may be considered only if symptoms are severe and have not improved with conservative treatment.

Living well with osteoarthritis

Staying active, informed, and positive is key. Many people live full and active lives with osteoarthritis by understanding their condition and managing it effectively.

When should I seek further help?

Contact your GP or physiotherapist if:

- Pain is worsening despite treatment
- You have significant difficulty with daily activities
- A joint becomes very swollen, hot, or red
- You are unsure how to exercise safely

Key messages

- Osteoarthritis is common and manageable
- Exercise is safe and beneficial for joints
- Pain does not always mean harm
- Support is available to help you stay active and independent

If you have any concerns or questions, please speak to your healthcare professional.