

Arthritis Types

Most people experience joint pain at some point in their lives, and many will assume that their joint pain is arthritis-related, especially as they get older. But what is arthritis? How do medical professionals determine if the condition of “joint pain” is truly arthritis? You may be surprised to learn that there are multiple types of arthritis with different symptoms, causes and treatments. Below we describe four of the most common types.

1. Osteoarthritis is defined as the degeneration of the cartilage and underlying bone of joints due to abnormal wear and tear. This leads to pain, stiffness, formation of bony spurs and clicking or grating sensations. Symptoms occur most often in the lower back, hips, knees and even the hands.

While osteoarthritis and degeneration will occur in most people as they grow older, it can be made worse by poor posture, increased weight, abnormal biomechanics and poor nutrition. Doctors can diagnose most cases of osteoarthritis based on symptom history, and may request X-rays for confirmation. Osteoarthritis is a degenerative condition, meaning it will become progressively worse over time.

2. Rheumatoid arthritis belongs to the autoimmune classification of diseases, which is where the immune system becomes confused and attacks normal tissues in the body. The body mistakenly mounts an inflammatory reaction around the joint capsule, which over time leads to destruction and deformity.

Usually many joints are affected, particularly small joints in the hands and feet and around the lower back. While it is characterized by periods of exacerbation and relief, ultimately this is a progressive disease that will become worse over time. With this type of arthritis the pain may actually get worse as you rest due to the build-up of inflammation. Blood tests and x-rays can help doctors to diagnose the condition, and treatment by a rheumatologist is central to management.

3. Gout is caused by excess build-up of uric acid within the blood stream. The uric acid forms urate crystals, which accumulate within the joint spaces, causing pain and inflammation. Excess uric acid is associated with a diet rich in meat, seafood, fructose and alcohol, as well as other factors including obesity, metabolic medical conditions, family history, and increased age. Historically known as “Rich man’s disease”, gout is also associated with kidney stones and management includes changing your diet to lower uric acid levels.

4. Psoriatic arthritis is an arthritis that visibly affects the skin as well as underlying joints. People tend to report symptoms such as red, white or silvery patches of dry skin, pain or discomfort in the skin, or pain in the underlying joints. The dry skin may appear on the knees, elbows, scalp, hands and feet, or on the spine. Factors that can make the symptoms of psoriasis worse include stress or anxiety, medications, exposure to excessive sunlight, smoking and alcohol, or injury to the skin.

If you suffer from arthritis, contact your GP and friendly physio for advice and proper assessment. They will help to guide your exercise journey and assist with other pain management strategies, helping to keep you active and healthy. Activities such as hydrotherapy, Pilates, and stretching have their place in maintaining correct posture and strengthening muscles appropriately to protect the body in areas of pain.

The above advice does not take the place of proper medical consultation. If you think you may have an arthritic condition, it is advisable to seek professional medical advice for the correct treatment.