

Degenerative Joint Disease

What is it?

Degenerative Joint Disease, also known as *arthritis*, affects an estimated 47 million Americans¹ across all age and racial groups. The terms “degenerative joint disease” and “arthritis” often refer to one of more than 100 chronic ailments that affect joints, muscles, and connective tissues. Though certain types of degenerative joint disease tend to afflict more mature patients, it is not restricted to the elderly — anyone of any age can be affected.

Symptoms

The symptoms of degenerative joint disease are different for everyone, but most often include a combination of the following:

- ✓ Continual or recurring pain, stiffness, and/or swelling in a (joint or joints)
- ✓ Difficulty moving a (joint or joints) in a normal manner

Diagnosis

Because the symptoms of degenerative joint disease often mimic other serious ailments, it is important to consult your physician for a diagnosis. In addition to listening carefully to your symptoms, and asking questions, your physician will likely perform imaging and/or lab tests to make a diagnosis. These tests may include a combination of the following:

- ✓ X-Ray or MRI of the affected joint area(s)
- ✓ Blood and/or urinalysis
- ✓ Arthrocentesis or joint aspiration

To gain an accurate diagnosis, it is important that you clearly and carefully describe your symptoms to your physician.

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Treatments

Because the type and severity of degenerative joint disease varies widely from one patient to the next, there are a variety of successful treatments for it. For any of them to succeed, the patient and his or her family must be active, dynamic parts of the treatment process. The goal of all arthritis treatments is the same — to relieve pain and restore as much use of the joint(s) as possible.



As part of your individual treatment plan, your physician is likely to recommend a combination of the following:

- ✓ Specific exercises to moderate swelling and pain in the affected joint(s)
- ✓ Exercised to restore mobility in the joint(s)
- ✓ Pain management, including heat or cold therapy, massage, and/or acupuncture
- ✓ Immobilization of joint(s) to avoid further injury or damage
- ✓ Assistive and/or support devices
- ✓ Weight control and/or nutritional counseling

For best results, it is vital that you and your family understand the goals of the recommended treatments. If you have questions, please ask! The key to a successful treatment plan is a well-educated patient.

Helpful Hints

- ✓ If there is a change in your symptoms, such as increased or unusual pain, please let your physician know right away.
- ✓ If you're unclear about a test, diagnosis, or any part of your treatment plan, please ask your physician. The more you know, the more successful your treatment plan will be!

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.