Worried About Your Joint Health? **Take Proper Measures to Protect your Joints Now!**

**Did You Know...**

- Osteoarthritis (OA) is the most common type of arthritis
- OA affects 1/10 Canadian adults
- It affects both women and men over the age of 60 equally
- This disease tends to worsen with age
- There currently is no cure for OA, but if diagnosed early enough you can start the right treatment and potentially delay or even in some cases avoid severe damage to your joints
- Most of the people affected with OA tend to lead active and productive lives with the help of the right medication, while individuals in more extreme cases may require surgery

**What is Osteoarthritis?**

The word “*arthritis*” refers to inflammation of the joint, whereas "*oste*" is described as of/or relating to the bones. Inflammation describes the pain, stiffness, redness and swelling. Osteoarthritis occurs when cartilage, the tough elastic material that covers and protects the end of the bones begins to wear away. Cartilage is both an aneural and avascular tissue in the adult and obtains its nutrition primarily from synovial fluid. In Layman’s terms it does not have a blood supply or sensation. This cartilage is essential to maintaining proper joint function; not only does it enable the joint to move smoothly, it also acts as a shock absorber. Osteoarthritis is commonly characterized by joint pain, impaired mobility, and synovial joint structural changes, and it is most commonly occurs in the hip, knee and finger joints.
Why Do People Get Osteoarthritis (OA)?

There are two main types of osteoarthritis, and are as follows:

1) **Primary Osteoarthritis**: occurs with no obvious reason, although risk factors may be present. Primary osteoarthritis primarily occurs in joints as the fingers, base of spine, and big toes.

2) **Secondary Osteoarthritis**: occurs when there is likely a cause for OA. Common cause of secondary OA is previous injury to the joint, although other risk factors may play a contributing role. Secondary osteoarthritis can occur in anyone but can be more commonly seen in profession athletes.

## Risk Factors for Developing Osteoarthritis

**Age** - The chances of developing osteoarthritis increase as we age. Age alone, however, does not mean the disease is inevitable.

**Family History** - Genetics play a large role in osteoarthritis development, and is more of an issue in small joints, such as the hands.

**Excess Weight** - Being overweight causes excess strain on your feet, knees and hips. Losing as little as 10 pounds can help alleviate the strain on your joints.

**Joint Injury** - Osteoarthritis is known to occur in joints that have been “damaged” by a previous injury.

**Complications of Other Types of Arthritis** - Osteoarthritis can occur in joints that a previous injury may have “damaged”. A common example, people with RA or gout can develop secondary osteoarthritis in the inflamed joints.

**Wear and Tear** - Osteoarthritis is not caused by wear and tear on the joints alone; it varies on individuals and their lifestyles. New research indicates that normal wear and tear does not lead to OA, as exercise is actually good for the joints.
Managing Osteoarthritis

Once your diagnosis is confirmed, there are many treatments that can help decrease your pain and increase your movement. Non medicinal therapies, such as physiotherapy, occupational therapy, education, physical activity, healthy eating and relaxation techniques, are a very important part of the treatment of OA.

Physical Activity protects joints by strengthening the muscles around them. Strong muscles and tissues support those joints that have been weakened and damaged by arthritis. A proper exercise regime reduces pain and fatigue, improves mobility and overall fitness. There are different exercises you can do to reduce pain and stiffness and are as follows:

- **Range of motion exercises**: help improve joint function by reducing pain and stiffness. To achieve the most benefit these exercises should be done daily. Consult a physiotherapist to learn safe exercises for you!
- **Strengthening exercises**: maintain or increase muscle tone and protect your joints.
- **Light to Moderate Stretching exercises**: help to relieve the pain and keep the muscles and tendons around the joints flexible such as Yoga.
- **Endurance exercises**: strengthen your heart, give you energy, control your weight (alleviating stress on your joints) and help you feel better overall. These exercises include things such as walking, swimming and cycling.

*Note: Most exercises can be safe with OA, but consult an exercise specialist such as a physiotherapist to make sure you are doing exercises right for you*

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