

## About the Arthritis Society

The Arthritis Society is a national health charity, fueled by donors and volunteers, with a vision to live in a world where people are free from the devastating effects that arthritis has on lives. Begun in 1948 with one very clear goal – to alleviate the suffering of people crippled by arthritis – that same volunteer-led passion carries on today in communities across Canada. Through the trust and support of our donors and sponsors, the Arthritis Society is Canada's largest charitable source of investment in cutting-edge arthritis research, and a leader in proactive advocacy and innovative solutions that will deliver better health outcomes for people affected by arthritis.



# Arthritis. Canada's most common chronic health condition.

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[arthritis.ca](http://arthritis.ca) | 1.800.321.1433

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# What is **Arthritis?**

The word arthritis means **inflammation of the joint**

("arthro" meaning joint and "itis" meaning inflammation). Inflammation is a medical term describing pain, stiffness, redness and swelling.

Arthritis is a disease that can involve any of the joints in the body, often occurring in the hip, knee, spine or other weight-bearing joints, but can also affect the fingers and other non-weight-bearing joints.

Symptoms of arthritis include joint pain, swelling, stiffness and fatigue.

Untreated inflammation can eventually lead to disability caused by joint damage and destruction. Some forms of arthritis can also affect the body's internal organs.

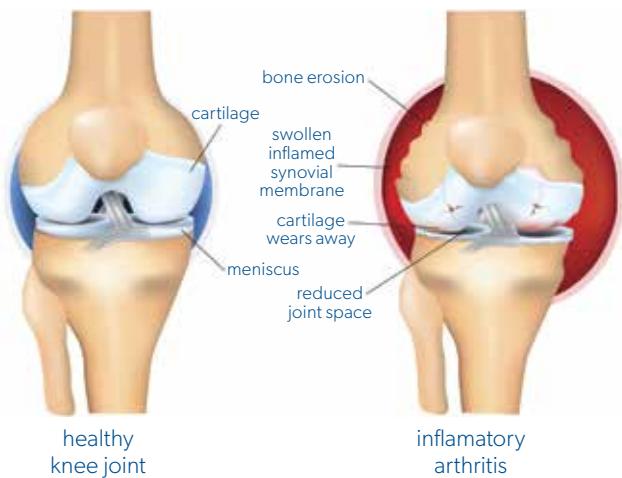
## What you should know about arthritis

- ▼ Arthritis is a serious and complex disease with over 100 different forms.
- ▼ Major types are inflammatory or IA: Rheumatoid (RA), Ankylosing Spondylitis (AS), Psoriatic (PsA), Lupus (SLE) and Childhood (JIA), non-autoimmune (gout) or Osteoarthritis (OA). Other conditions, such as Fibromyalgia, have symptoms similar to arthritis.
- ▼ Some types of arthritis can affect the heart, lungs, kidneys and even the skin.
- ▼ Arthritis can co-exist with other life-threatening diseases like heart disease, diabetes and cancer.
- ▼ Left untreated, arthritis can cause unwanted changes in joints and permanent damage.
- ▼ Arthritis results in painful inflammation and stiffness in the joints, making it difficult to move.
- ▼ There is no cure for arthritis, leaving those diagnosed with a life-long health challenge deeply affecting quality of life.
- ▼ Severe arthritis pain can profoundly affect the ability to carry on everyday tasks, to work and can lead to poor mental health.
- ▼ Carrying excess weight increases the prevalence of OA, as it puts excess stress on weight-bearing joints.
- ▼ Genetics can point to higher risk of some forms of arthritis, such as RA.

## What is Inflammatory Arthritis?

Inflammatory arthritis (IA) includes a group of conditions where the body's defense system begins to attack healthy tissues, particularly around the joints, causing inflammation – redness and swelling which causes pain and, when in the joints, can also cause stiffness. Left untreated, inflammation can lead to significant and often irreparable damage to the affected areas, resulting in loss of function and disability.

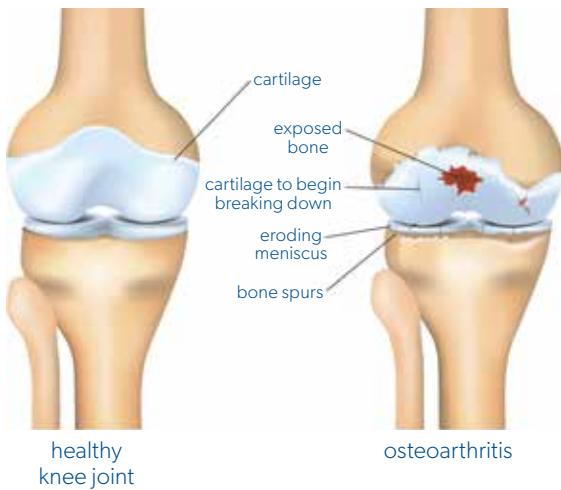
Early treatment aimed at reducing inflammation is important to prevent joint damage. The cause of inflammatory arthritis are numerous, such as infections, trauma, and autoimmune reactions where the immune system attacks the body.



## What is Osteoarthritis?

Osteoarthritis (OA) is the most common type of arthritis. It affects more Canadians than all other forms of arthritis combined.

OA used to be described as a degenerative or "wear-and-tear" arthritis, but recent studies describe it as a result of the body's failed attempt to repair damaged joint tissues.



This condition leads to the breakdown of cartilage (the tough elastic material that covers and protects the ends of bones) and the underlying bone, resulting in pain, stiffness, swelling and reduction in range of movement in the affected joint. The joints most commonly affected by OA are the knees, hips and those found in the hands and spine. The cause of OA is complex, with development of OA depending on the interplay between factors such as age, obesity, gender, occupation (injury as a result of a physical job), participation in certain sports, history of joint injury or surgery and genetics.

For more information on IA, OA and other forms of arthritis, please visit [arthritis.ca](http://arthritis.ca)

# A Comparison of Inflammatory Arthritis and Osteoarthritis

## INFLAMMATORY ARTHRITIS (IA)

### Examples of the disease

- Rheumatoid arthritis (RA)
- Psoriatic arthritis (PsA)
- Ankylosing spondylitis (AS)
- Systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE)
- Juvenile idiopathic arthritis (JIA)

### WHAT IS THE CAUSE?

The body's immune system attacks the joints and sometimes other organs ("autoimmune disease")

### HOW DOES IT START? (WARNING SIGNS)

#### There are many forms of IA; signs that are typical for most include:

- Pain, swelling and stiffness in one or multiple joints
- Morning stiffness in and around the affected joints lasting at least one hour
- Pain and stiffness that worsens with inactivity and improves with physical activity
- Reduced range of motion
- Sometimes fever, weight loss, fatigue and/or anemia

### HOW MANY JOINTS DOES IT AFFECT?

- Usually affects multiple joints
- Different types of IA have differing patterns of joint involvement. For example, RA tends to be symmetrical, involving joints on both sides of the body (e.g., both hands, both elbows, etc.), whereas psoriatic arthritis may be asymmetrical or symmetrical

### WHAT JOINTS CAN BE AFFECTED?

#### Any joint can be affected, but most commonly:

- Small joints of the hands and feet
- Wrists, elbows, shoulders, knees, lower back and hips

### WHAT MEDICATIONS ARE AVAILABLE?

- Analgesics (painkillers)
- Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)
- Steroids (oral and injections)
- Disease modifying anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARDs)
- Biologics

## OSTEOARTHRITIS (OA)

### Examples of the disease

- OA

### WHAT IS THE CAUSE?

Progressive joint damage and failed repair of joint cartilage due to interplay between a number of factors (e.g., age, gender, occupation, genetics, previous joint injury)

### HOW DOES IT START? (WARNING SIGNS)

- Very early symptoms of OA are intermittent pain with strenuous activity; with time, the pain is present more often
- Morning stiffness or stiffness after a period of inactivity, lasting less than 30 minutes
- Joint grinding (crepitus)

### HOW MANY JOINTS DOES IT AFFECT?

Usually a few joints or a single joint, often with asymmetrical joint involvement early on (e.g., one knee may be affected, but not the other)

### WHAT JOINTS CAN BE AFFECTED?

- Weight-bearing joints, such as hips and knees
- Neck
- Lower back
- Hands

### WHAT MEDICATIONS ARE AVAILABLE?

- Analgesics (painkillers)
- Topical capsaicin
- Non-steroid anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) - oral and topical
- Joint injections: viscosupplementation and steroids

## Who gets Arthritis?

Arthritis affects people of every age, gender and ethnic background. Genetics, age and lifestyle can all play a part in increasing one's risk of developing arthritis. Today more than 6 million Canadians have arthritis, that's 1 in 5 people. By 2035, 1 in 4 people will be diagnosed.

## How is Arthritis Diagnosed?

Your doctor will be able to provide a diagnosis based on your history, physical examination and diagnostic tests that may include blood tests and x-rays.

## Top 5 Tips for Managing Arthritis

- 1. Get Educated:** Know the type of arthritis you have and the treatments available. Be informed about the factors that may improve or worsen your arthritis.
- 2. Stay Involved:** Be an active participant both in decisions about your care and day-to-day self management.
- 3. Know Your Resources:** Know where to get the support and resources you need.
- 4. Stay Healthy:** Exercise regularly and appropriately. Eat a balanced, healthy diet. Get adequate rest and maintain a healthy weight.
- 5. Know Your Treatment:** Understand your treatments – what they do, side effects and what can happen if the treatment plan is not followed. Tell your healthcare provider(s) about all of the prescription and non-prescription medications and treatments you are taking, including complementary and alternative therapies. It is also important to follow your treatment plan and let your healthcare provider know if/when this is not possible. Your healthcare provider can help you the most when he/she has all the right information.

## Arthritis Treatment Options

Arthritis affects everyone differently and treatment should be tailored to each individual's needs with guidance from a health-care team (e.g., family doctor, rheumatologist, surgeon, occupational therapist, etc.).

▼ **Medication:** Drugs can help control the symptoms of arthritis and suppress inflammation; in some cases, drugs slow the progression of the disease and prevent damage. [arthritis.ca/medicationguide](#)

▼ **Exercise and Physical Activity:** Physical activity and exercise protects joints by strengthening the muscles around them. Strong muscles and tissues support those joints that have been weakened and damaged by arthritis. A properly designed exercise program with advice from a healthcare provider reduces pain and fatigue, improves mobility, overall fitness and alleviates depression. Physical activity and exercise can help someone with arthritis lead a more productive and enjoyable life.

▼ **Complementary medicine:** There are numerous complementary and alternative treatments available that may help ease the symptoms of arthritis. These include chiropractic, massage therapy as well as dietary supplements and relaxation techniques.

▼ **Diet:** Eating a healthy, balanced diet can often help. Maintaining a healthy body weight is important as excess weight can put an extra burden on your weight-bearing joints. For gout, a specific diet low in purine (chemical compounds found in foods like animal products) is recommended.

▼ **Surgery:** In situations where other treatments are ineffective, a physician may recommend surgery. This may involve replacing the affected joint (e.g., the hip, knee or shoulder). Another procedure that can help relieve arthritis symptoms is joint fusion. If surgery is something you are facing, visit [arthritis.ca/surgery](#) for more information.

## Knowing you have arthritis is important

The Arthritis Society has developed, with the input of experts, a simple online tool to help you communicate more effectively with your health care provider about symptoms you may be experiencing and the possible indications for the symptoms. You can download the results and take it to your doctor for an assessment.

Try the symptom checker.

[arthritis.ca/symptomchecker](http://arthritis.ca/symptomchecker)



\*Disclaimer: The information provided is for educational purposes and should not be used for diagnosing or treating a health problem. The information provided is not a substitute for professional advice, diagnosis or treatment. If you have or suspect you may have a health problem, you should consult with your health care provider.

## Ways You Can Help

### Become a Volunteer

By volunteering with the Arthritis Society, you can help others through meaningful work, give back to your community, learn new skills, gain work experience and meet new friends. Visit [arthritis.ca](http://arthritis.ca) or call **1.800.321.1433**

### Support the work of the Arthritis Society

Donations to the Arthritis Society support vital research and services that help improve the lives of people with arthritis. There are many ways to give. Visit [arthritis.ca/donate](http://arthritis.ca/donate) to make a contribution and learn more. [arthritis.ca/donate](http://arthritis.ca/donate)

## Ways the Arthritis Society Helps

### Website and Information Line

Visit our website to get information about arthritis and to find resources and events. Or call our Information Line.

[arthritis.ca](http://arthritis.ca) | 1-800-321-1433



### Living Well Content Hub

Find health and wellness guidance, self-management tips, inspirational stories, a sense of community and so much more to help people move through life with arthritis and flourish despite it. Visit [flourish](http://flourish.arthritis.ca), our on-line content hub, to help those living with arthritis. [arthritis.ca/flourish](http://arthritis.ca/flourish)



### Self-management Education and Webinars

Our on-line courses and webinars help people with arthritis become their own advocate by providing expert insight into how to cope with the effects of arthritis such as chronic pain, anxiety and fatigue.

[arthritis.ca/education](http://arthritis.ca/education)

### Navigating Arthritis

Knowing where to turn can be a real challenge when dealing with the many facets of arthritis. Our new navigation guides provide a valuable reference tool where to find vital healthcare information and services in each province.

[arthritis.ca/navigation](http://arthritis.ca/navigation)

### Childhood Arthritis

Arthritis strikes more than 3 in 1000 infants, children and teens. Our commitment is to help children and their families break through the isolation of living with a chronic disease. Across Canada we give children with arthritis the opportunity to attend summer camp. We also provide newly diagnosed children with an arthritis-friendly backpack that reduces strain on their vulnerable joints. [arthritis.ca/childhood](http://arthritis.ca/childhood)