

Orthopaedic Connection

Questions and Answers About Osteoarthritis

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Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

Facts: Osteoarthritis (OA) is the most common form of arthritis and is a leading cause of disability in the world. OA affects more women than men and is more common in older persons.

This makes OA my professional enemy.

- **Is OA just the result of aging?**

Until the 1980's, OA was considered a natural occurrence of "wear and tear" on our joints.

Recent research is changing this view.

- **What are the differences between an osteoarthritic joint and a normal aging joint?**

There are several differences.

1. Water content
In an aging joint, water stays the same. In an OA joint, water increases in the early stage.
2. Cells
In OA the joint cells change their shape and there are chemical changes. Aging joint - no changes.
3. Bone
In OA there are visible changes in the bone (spurs, etc.). They are not seen in the aging joint.
4. Changes inside on the joint surface
In OA it occurs primarily in the knee and hip. In the aging joint it occurs on joint surfaces that don't bear weight.

- **What is the major impact of OA?**

The primary effect of OA is pain that can lead to disability. The cause of the pain is generally inflammation or joint surface roughness (incongruity).

- **How many people in the United States have OA?**

About 23% of the adult population.

- **Is OA one disease or many?**

We know there are many other kinds of arthritis besides OA. Rheumatoid arthritis for example. Several studies seem to indicate OA is many disorders with a similar outcome. It is confusing, I know.

- **Does race or ethnic background play a role?**

OA seems to be higher in white people than other races.

- **What about heredity in OA?**

OA has a strong genetic connection. I have done many joint replacements on patients who say one or both of their parents also had a joint replacement. In addition gene mutations in a person may be a factor in developing OA.

- **What about other risk factors?**

Risk factors are not as clear as genetics in causing OA. But there does seem to be a connection.

1. Injury or occupation

No question there is a high incidence of OA in people who have had joint injuries or a fracture into a joint and athletes who have abused joints.

2. Diseases and hereditary conditions that affect bones and connective tissues can lead to OA.

3. Excessive weight causes greater pressure of weight bearing joints.

4. Nutrition

Possibly insufficient Calcium and Vitamins C and D may contribute to developing OA in later life.

This is the end of our little segment to try to clarify OA for you.

I have spent a major portion of my life battling OA for my patients.

The battle takes place in the office, hospital and educational efforts that I have outlined recently in a Gratiot County Herald article.

More information about arthritis is available on our office teaching website www.orthopodsurgeon.com that takes you to Your Orthopaedic Connection.

See you next week.

Our goal is simple - To help people lead more pain free, functional lives. I specialize in you.

Good health. Good life. All the best to you.

Be well.

Dr. Haverbush