

Orthopaedic Connection

Arthritis: Less Mysterious I Hope

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Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

Last week as class was finishing I pointed out that there are typically several causes of arthritis not just one cause.

Some causes include advanced age, overuse, trauma to the joint as in sports, excessive weight and heredity. To be more specific, subtle changes begin to occur inside the joint. The tissue substance covering the ends of the bones starts to change.

This covering is called the articular cartilage. It is a firm cushion and is an extremely smooth surface. The friction in the joint is often said to be equal to wet ice! The joint is made even more slippery by the synovial fluid present in all joints.

The Change

Whatever mechanism triggers the change this is what occurs. The surface begins to have little fissures or cracks. The quality of the lubrication fluid can change also.

These changes are very subtle and can be progressive over years. You may not have any clue that they are even occurring. In the earliest stages plain x-rays look entirely normal.

Symptoms

They can vary widely, but often are described as stiffness, aching, mild swelling and feeling of weakness in the joint. You don't need me to spend a lot of time telling you what your symptoms are!! They come and go and are not always present. The symptoms are often present over years before someone seeks medical help.

Correct Diagnosis

I sound like a broken record about this I realize, but proper management of arthritis depends on the correct diagnosis. Everything that hurts around a joint is not arthritis. Correct diagnosis is the key.

Treatment

For arthritis in the hips to the feet, exercise and weight loss are the two most important factors. Losing 10 – 20 lbs makes a huge difference in the force on the joints. Unfortunately very few people will do this. To lose more is obviously even better, but 10 - 20 lbs can help tremendously.

Stronger muscles act like shock absorbers for the joints reducing additional stress on joints along with weight loss. Swimming if possible, a stationary or recumbent stationary bike is a good form of exercise and puts minimal stress on joints. If able, walking is a great form of exercise for many patients.

Weight loss and exercise programs ideally should be supervised by a health care professional if you are to receive the maximum benefit.

Medication

Acetaminophen, Tylenol for pain
Ibuprofen, Motrin, Advil for pain *and* inflammation
Aspirin or Bufferin

Celebrex, prescription anti-inflammatory
Many other prescription anti-inflammatory medications
Norco, Vicodin – No, No, No.
Pain patches
Theragesic applied over the joint
Steroid Injection

Surgery

Only if an Orthopaedic Surgeon such as myself determines that your particular arthritis would benefit from surgery and other conservative treatment has been tried first.

Two other medical specialties play a major role in the conservative management of arthritis. These specialties are Rheumatology (a subspecialty of Internal Medicine) and Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation.

Office Website and Gratiot County Herald Archive

What if there was a whole world of musculoskeletal information at one place? There is!

www.orthopodsurgeon.com opens up for you the office Website, Your Orthopaedic Connection and the Archive of all previous GCH articles I have written for you, your family and friends.

Please check it out. Do yourself a favor.

Be well.

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