

Argus Orthopaedic Zone

Osteoarthritis, It's More Than You Think

By Thomas J. Haverbush, M.D.
Orthopaedic Surgeon

Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

Most patients (and some doctors!) call anything that hurts around a joint..... “Arthritis”.

Often no x-rays are done and the patient becomes more depressed because now they can't stop thinking about “arthritis”.

There are a ton of other things that make bones and joints hurt. So if a plain x-ray wasn't done to confirm arthritis, you might want to try to have a plain x-ray before getting too worried about arthritis. No MRI please!! I don't need it 9 times out of 10 to make the diagnosis of actual “true” arthritis. But I digress.

Worn Out Joint

Patients and most doctors and other providers think arthritis is wearing down of the joint and bones coming closer together, maybe even touching.

It is that for sure, but that is only the half of it. Arthritis is so much more than that.

To clarify here I am talking about “Osteoarthritis”. It gets too confusing to include Rheumatoid Arthritis in the discussion. Osteoarthritis makes up 90% of arthritis. That is our topic.

Certainly Osteoarthritis causes a worn out and a rough joint surface. No doubt. But it is way more than that.

Like What?

Well for starters, over weight people have too many fat cells. These extra cells were once thought to be dormant. They were just there doing nothing. WRONG.

Now we know these fat cells are tiny little factories producing inflammatory substances. These substances are found in high concentration in joints.

They cause the articular cartilage cushion in joints to degrade and become scratchy and worn and rough. See, it is becoming clearer that mechanical pressure from weight alone is not the only factor in joints breaking down.

The adipose cells in the abdomen are especially active in secreting inflammatory substances.

Whole Joint Disease

It is unbelievable how many changes develop in an arthritic joint. I will list some.

- Cysts develop in the bone near the joint surface.
- Capsule and ligaments around joint become stiff and thick.
- Synovial joint fluid deteriorates.
- Bone spurs form at edge of the joint
- Joint lining (synovium) puts out bad substances.
- Calcium crystals can form in the joint.
- Ligaments stretch as joint surface is deformed (bow leg, knock knee)
- Stimulation of sensory nerves around joint causes pain.

Gee, I Didn't Know That

I probably have told you way more than you wanted to know about Osteoarthritis. It is a very complicated subject as you can see. Osteoarthritis is the end result of many different things that can cause joint damage.

Since so much of the Osteoarthritis we see is genetic (blame Mom, Grandfather, etc!) I think that is where “a cure for arthritis” will be found. To identify a person’s risk for Osteoarthritis genetically and change the gene expression. However, that won’t prevent all the arthritis that comes from sports injuries, but that is its own huge problem, isn’t it?

Have a good week. See you next week.

Our goal is quality, highest standards and best outcomes.

Office Website and Argus Orthopaedic Archive

I hope what you have read has raised questions. No problem!

Please log onto www.orthopodsurgeon.com. It has a huge amount of musculoskeletal information in the Website and the Archive of all previous Argus articles.

Check it out and be amazed what you can learn.

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

Dr. Haverbush