

Argus Orthopaedic Zone

I'll Try To Demystify Arthritis

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

Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

Arthritis is confusing to most people. I don't mean in the sense of how it makes your body feel. Simply put it hurts. I don't go a day in the office without someone saying, "I'm full of arthritis" or "I have arthritis all over my body."

Patients describe their pain vividly from a constant dull ache to a shooting pain in the knees, hips, hands, back etc.

Confusion

Did you know there are more than 100 different kinds of arthritis and rheumatic diseases and conditions all lumped under the umbrella of "arthritis"? Really it is true. And they can all feel similar. Furthermore doctors and other providers of healthcare tend to call anything that hurts in the neck, back, arms and legs – "arthritis" often without doing an x-ray or any other testing!

Well it does give the patient a diagnosis (often incorrect). A prescription is written and the doctor is off to the next exam room. Hmm. I admit it does save time during office hours.

Proper Diagnosis Is The Key

All sorts of aches and pains which are seen in the office are often lumped into the diagnosis of arthritis. Muscle strains, tendinitis, bursitis, rotator cuff tears, torn cartilage etc etc are all called arthritis at one point or another without a careful diagnosis being made. Treatment (whatever it is) can only succeed if the diagnosis is accurate.

I'm not saying that every patient has to have x-rays, lab test, etc. If you are not improving though, I think a closer look is warranted. That might include x-rays, lab tests or even referral to a specialist.

Osteoarthritis

Osteoarthritis is the big gorilla in the room. It is far and away the most common form of arthritis. Osteoarthritis is however, a very specific diagnosis.

Osteoarthritis is the breakdown of the cartilage cushion in the affected joint. Cartilage covers the end of the bones and causes the joint to move smoothly. If for whatever reason the cartilage deteriorates, the bones can begin to rub together which causes pain, stiffness, and loss of motion. Spurs form and the joint capsule thickens.

Other Types of Arthritis

Some other kinds of arthritis are

- Rheumatoid Arthritis
- Post traumatic (injury) arthritis
- Gout
- Lupus (fairly rare)

It isn't possible to go into detail here about all the other arthritis forms. Knowing some of their names and the fact that they are different from osteoarthritis is sufficient.

What Causes Osteoarthritis?

There are many causes actually and they can overlap. Finding “a cure” for arthritis therefore is unlikely for this reason. It could be compared to finding “a cure” for cancer. Finding a cure for a *specific* type of cancer or a *specific* type of arthritis might be possible, however.

OK, What are Some Causes of Osteoarthritis?

- Advanced age
- Overuse
- Trauma to a joint as in sports
- Overweight
- Heredity, Genetics

Doctors refer to many causes of a disease with the word multifactorial. For example, I may see a man in the office for a knee problem. He tells me he had a knee injury in High School, he is 40 lbs overweight and his mother and one sister have had total knee replacements. What is the cause for his osteoarthritis? See what I mean.

More

I have a lot more to say about arthritis so won't you please join me again next time to learn more about what a huge public health problem arthritis is and it is only going to worsen in the years to come.

Have a good week.

Office Website and Argus Orthopaedic Zone Archive

Thank you loyal readers for joining us each week. Do yourself a favor and log onto www.orthopodsurgeon.com.

It contains a world of musculoskeletal information you and your family and friends can use! Website, Your Orthopaedic Connection, Archive of all previous Argus articles. Please check it out. Be well.

Dr. Haverbush