

Osteoarthritis

As we age, strengthening our joints can alleviate pain

Osteoarthritis (OA), which is sometimes called degenerative joint disease or “wear and tear” arthritis, occurs when the cartilage or cushion between joints breaks down and causes pain, stiffness, and swelling.

OA affects 80% of patients over the age of 50, ranking fifth among all disabilities worldwide. Its incidence is almost always tied to the loss of cartilage in the joints, usually because of aging and repetitive use, which makes the joints weak, unstable, and susceptible to chronic pain.

Cartilage provides a smooth, gliding surface for joint motion and acts as a cushion between the bones. In OA, the cartilage breaks down, causing pain, swelling, and problems moving the joint. As OA worsens over time, bones may break down and develop growths called spurs.¹

Common risk factors besides increasing age include obesity, previous joint injury, overuse of the joint, weak thigh muscles, and genetic factors.

“Fortunately, this is not a condition that causes inflammation throughout the body and affecting all the joints; symptoms are confined only to the affected joints,” **according to Peng Thim Fan, MD, rheumatologist, and a Teladoc expert medical consultant.**

While there is no way to slow down the onset of OA or prevent progressive joint deterioration, Dr. Fan observed, “Our treatments are really directed at protecting the affected joints by exercising and

strengthening muscles around the joints.” He added that doctors encourage weight reduction as a means of minimizing the stress on affected joints. “**The knee bears six times your body weight when you get up from a sitting or squatting position and when you walk. The hips and big toes bear about three times your body weight,**” Dr. Fan said.

While narcotic treatments and supplements such as glucosamine sulfate and chondroitin are commonly recognized approaches to managing or reducing OA pain, neither is seen as being as effective as weight management and moderate physical activity to strengthen the areas surrounding affected joints.

Dr. Fan also notes the importance of confirming that the pain is truly caused by the damaged structure and not part of a chronic pain syndrome like fibromyalgia, particularly if surgical remedies are being considered. Because of this, the benefits of using Teladoc’s Expert Medical Opinion can be particularly useful in OA cases.

Through your Teladoc benefit, experts like Dr. Fan can research your specific case and provide a thorough expert second opinion to either confirm or adjust your existing diagnosis and treatment.

¹<https://www.arthritis.org/about-arthritis/types/osteoarthritis/what-is-osteoarthritis.php>

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