



## OrthoInfo Basics

# Hip Osteoarthritis

**Osteoarthritis, also known as “wear and tear” arthritis, is a common problem for many people after they reach middle age.**

Osteoarthritis often affects the hip joint. It develops slowly and the pain it causes worsens over time.

Although there is no cure for osteoarthritis, there are many treatment options available. Using these, people with osteoarthritis are able to manage pain, stay active, and live fulfilling lives.



### What is hip osteoarthritis?

Osteoarthritis is the most common type of hip arthritis.

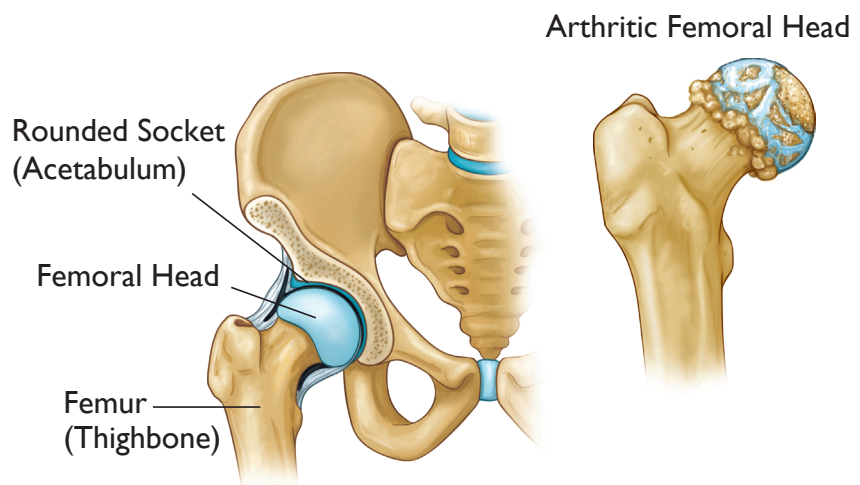
Your hip joint is made up of a ball (the head of your thighbone) that fits into a rounded socket in your pelvis.

A healthy hip moves easily because of a smooth, slippery tissue called articular cartilage. Cartilage covers and protects the bones that make up your hip joint. Osteoarthritis causes this cartilage to wear away.

**How it happens.** Osteoarthritis occurs over time. When the cartilage wears away, it becomes frayed and rough. Moving the bones along this exposed surface is painful.

If the cartilage wears away completely, it can result in bone rubbing on bone. To make up for the lost cartilage, the damaged bones may start to grow outward and form painful spurs.

**Symptoms.** Pain is the most common symptom of hip osteoarthritis. This may cause you to limp when you put weight on your leg. Your hip may feel stiff, making it hard to move. Symptoms tend to be worse in the morning or after a period of inactivity.



## What causes hip osteoarthritis?

Several factors may increase your risk for developing osteoarthritis.

**Age.** The ability of cartilage to heal itself decreases as we age. Hip osteoarthritis typically affects older adults.

**Weight.** The more you weigh, the more stress you put on your hip joints.

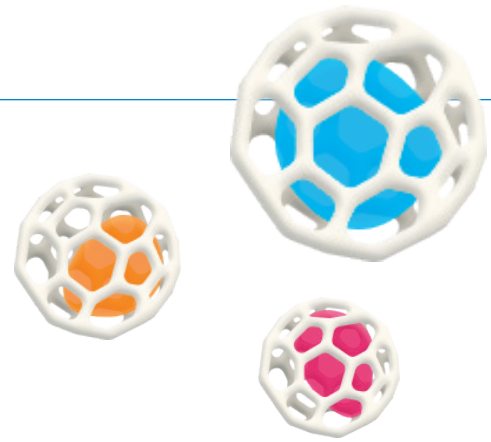
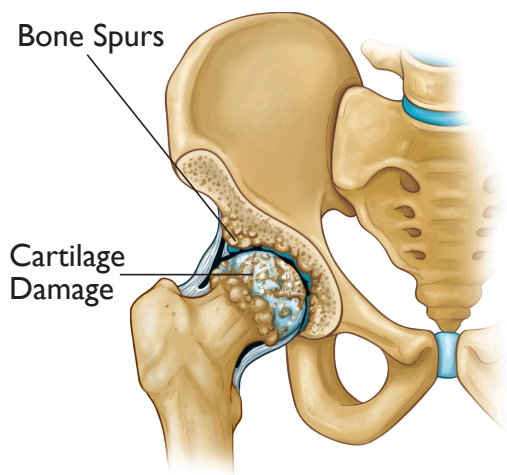
**Injury.** Previous hip injury, such as from an accident, can lead to osteoarthritis later in life.

**Other illnesses.** Some diseases put you at greater risk for osteoarthritis, such as septic arthritis, sickle cell anemia, and lupus.

## Is it better to get diagnosed early?

Because osteoarthritis worsens over time, the sooner you start treatment, the better.

Your doctor may order x-rays to confirm you have osteoarthritis. Healthy cartilage creates a space between the ball-and-socket of the hip joint. X-rays show if cartilage damage has decreased this space. They may also show if bone spurs have developed.



## What are common treatments?

Your doctor will develop a personal treatment plan to relieve your joint pain and stiffness.

**Lifestyle changes.** If arthritis pain does not interfere with your daily routine, your doctor may first recommend lifestyle changes to protect your joint and slow the disease's progress.

**Exercise.** If you regularly do high-impact exercises (running, competitive sports), switching to low-impact activities will put less stress on your hip. Walking, cycling, and swimming are good low-impact options.

**Weight loss.** If you are overweight, losing just a few pounds can make a big difference in the amount of stress you place on your hip joint.

**Physical therapy.** Specific exercises can improve the range-of-motion in your hip and strengthen the muscles that support the joint. Assistive devices, like a cane or supportive shoe inserts, can also help reduce stress on your joint. Your therapist may also teach you to use ice and heat treatments to help manage your pain.

**Medications.** If your pain affects your daily routine, or is not relieved by initial methods, your doctor may add medication to your plan.

(continued on page 3)

*(Common Treatments — continued from page 2)*

**Acetaminophen.** Mild pain is often relieved with acetaminophen.

**Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medicines.** Drugs like aspirin and ibuprofen reduce pain and swelling.

**Dietary supplements.** Some people report that over-the-counter supplements like glucosamine and chondroitin sulfate provide pain relief. Talk to your doctor before using supplements.

**Surgery.** Your doctor may consider surgery if your pain worsens and causes disability.

**Arthroscopy.** This procedure is often used to remove bone spurs, loose cartilage pieces, or smooth out areas of worn cartilage.

**Osteotomy.** Either the head of the thighbone or part of the pelvis around the socket is cut and realigned to take pressure off of the hip joint.

**Joint replacement.** In a total hip replacement, the severely damaged hip joint is removed and replaced with an artificial device. Although total hip replacement is the most common replacement procedure, other options include partial hip replacements and hip resurfacing.

### Living with osteoarthritis

---

Learning you have osteoarthritis can be discouraging. Treatment options can help, and there are many things you can do to lessen the impact arthritis has on your life.

**Talk to your doctor.** If your symptoms worsen or you are having a hard time coping, your doctor can review your treatment plan.

**Consult a physical therapist.** A physical therapist will teach you exercises to improve your strength and flexibility. A therapist can also help you find new ways to do everyday activities. Simple changes, like using a reacher to pick up low-lying things, can make a huge difference in relieving joint pain. Your therapist

may suggest assistive equipment for your bathroom, like a shower bench, elevated toilet seat, and handrails.

**Get plenty of rest.** Osteoarthritis can make you more tired, and your arthritis symptoms may worsen when you are fatigued. Try to get a full night's sleep, and take short naps during the day if you need to.

**Discuss alternative medicine with your doctor.** Some alternative therapies appear to help arthritis pain. Talk to your doctor before trying any alternative treatments. They could interfere with your treatment plan.

### For more information

---

For more information about hip osteoarthritis, visit *OrthoInfo* at [www.orthoinfo.org](http://www.orthoinfo.org).

*OrthoInfo* is the patient education website of the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons (AAOS), and is a trusted source of information about musculoskeletal conditions. Our articles are developed by orthopaedic surgeons, and provide detailed information about a wide range of injuries and diseases, as well as treatment options and prevention topics.

AAOS does not endorse any treatments, procedures, products, or physicians referenced herein. This information is provided as an educational service and is not intended to serve as medical advice. Anyone seeking specific orthopaedic advice or assistance should consult his or her orthopaedic surgeon.

