



Arthritis Overview

Arthritis is a condition that causes pain, stiffness, and swelling in or around joints. Arthritis affects about 40 million Americans, and nearly 50 percent of people 65 years old and older. Arthritic conditions limit the activity of more than 7 million people in the United States and are second only to heart disease as a cause of work disability. Progression of certain arthritis types, such as osteoarthritis, may be slowed in certain cases by following well-structured disease management strategies. Arthritis can be managed better by identifying symptoms early and taking measures to reduce pain, discomfort, and the risk of disability.

The two most common types of arthritis are osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis. These are separate diseases that affect people in different ways.

Osteoarthritis is the most common type of arthritis, affecting more than 21 million Americans. It is also called “degenerative joint disease” and most often involved the weight-bearing joints. Osteoarthritis results from mechanical joint damage – whether from long-term “wear and tear” or previous injury. Osteoarthritis is usually diagnosed in people older than 40.

Osteoarthritis has no cure. However, treatments allow most people with the disease to lead active and productive lives. Treatment plans often include methods for pain management and improving function. Such plans may include exercise, rest and joint care, pain relief, weight control, and medication.

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) does not result from overuse of joints. Rather, it is an autoimmune disease. For reasons that are not fully known, the body’s own natural immune system develops a response against its joint tissue that results in inflammation and damage. It can affect someone’s entire body and often causes symptoms like fatigue and fever, in addition to joint pain. RA is most commonly diagnosed in people ages 25 to 50, but can affect people of all ages, including children.

The National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal Diseases says treatments for rheumatoid arthritis can help relieve pain, reduce swelling, slow down or help prevent joint damage, increase function, and improve overall well-being. Most people take medications for RA. Some drugs provide only pain relief, some reduce inflammation, and others, called disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drugs, may slow the course of the disease.

Talk with your physician if you think you have arthritis symptoms.

Source: UnitedHealthcare

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