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May is Arthritis Awareness Month

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If you experience any arthritis symptoms, it's important to consult with a doctor or other qualified healthcare professional for diagnosis and treatment.

OVERVIEW

Arthritis Awareness Month is observed annually in May. This month aims to raise awareness about arthritis, a group of conditions that cause joint pain, stiffness, and inflammation. While most people have probably heard of arthritis, it's likely that many of them don't know much about the impact of arthritis, the #1 cause of disability in the United States. The Arthritis Foundation calls attention to this painful and debilitating condition that affects nearly 60 million men, women and children in the U.S.

Arthritis isn't a single disease. The term refers to joint pain or joint disease, and there are more than 100 types of arthritis and related conditions. People of all ages, races and sexes live with arthritis. It's most common among women, and although it's not a disease of aging, some types of arthritis occur in older people more than younger people.

Common arthritis symptoms include swelling, pain, stiffness and diminished range of motion in joints. Symptoms vary from mild to severe and may come and go. Some may stay about the same for years, but symptoms can also progress and get worse over time. Severe arthritis can result in chronic pain, difficulty performing daily activities and make walking and climbing stairs painful and grueling.* Arthritis can also cause permanent joint changes. These may be visible, such as knobby finger joints, but often damage can be seen only on X-rays. Some types of arthritis affect the heart, eyes, lungs, kidneys and skin as well as joints.

Basic Facts About Arthritis

- Arthritis affects over 53 million Americans. About 1 in 4 adults and many children have been diagnosed .
- It's not just an "old person's" disease. About 2/3 of those living with arthritis are aged 65 and under.
- Osteoarthritis is the most common type of arthritis.
- Arthritis costs the U.S. economy over \$300 billion annually and is the nation's top cause of disability.
- Most people with arthritis accompanying conditions, like heart disease, diabetes and obesity.
- Nearly 26 million of those with arthritis are unable to do everyday activities, including walking.
- More adults in rural areas of the U.S. are affected by arthritis — 1 in 3 — than in urban areas.
- 1 in 3 adults are not physically active, have fair to poor health and have severe joint pain.**

*Rath, Linda, Arthritis Foundation. 6/9/22. <https://www.arthritis.org/health-wellness/about-arthritis/understanding-arthritis/what-is-arthritis>

**Williams, Anthony. Arthritis Foundation, 5-1-24. <https://www.arthritis.org/about-arthritis/arthritis-awareness-month>

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS OF ARTHRITIS

Arthritis symptoms often develop slowly and worsen over time. Symptoms vary, but common signs include joint pain, stiffness, swelling, redness, and limited range of motion. Some types of arthritis, like rheumatoid arthritis, can also cause fatigue, fever, and changes in nails or skin.

Common symptoms include: *

- **Joint Pain:** Can be sharp, dull, or throbbing, and may be worse with movement or after periods of rest.
- **Stiffness:** Stiffness is often most noticeable in the morning or after periods of inactivity, and can last for 30 minutes or longer.
- **Tenderness:** Joints might feel tender when you apply light pressure to or near them.
- **Loss of flexibility:** Inability to move your joint through its full range of motion.
- **Swelling:** Joints may appear swollen and inflamed, and may feel warm or tender to the touch.
- **Redness:** The skin around the affected joint may appear red or inflamed.
- **Bone spurs.** These extra bits of bone, which feel like hard lumps, can form around the affected joint.
- **Limited Range of Motion:** The ability to move the joint may be restricted due to pain and swelling.
- **Cracking or Grinding:** Grating sensation when you use the joint, and you might hear popping or crackling.
- **Fatigue:** Feeling unusually tired or weak. Usually accompanies one or more of the above symptoms.
- **Fever:** A high body temperature. Usually accompanies one or more of the above symptoms.
- **Weight Loss:** Unexplained weight loss. Usually accompanies one or more of the above symptoms.
- **Numbness or Tingling:** Swelling in the joints can press on nerves, causing numbness or tingling in the hands or feet.
- **Changes in Nails or Skin:** Nails appear pitted, thickened, or separated from nail bed. Skin rashes or patches may occur.



What are arthritis symptoms and signs?

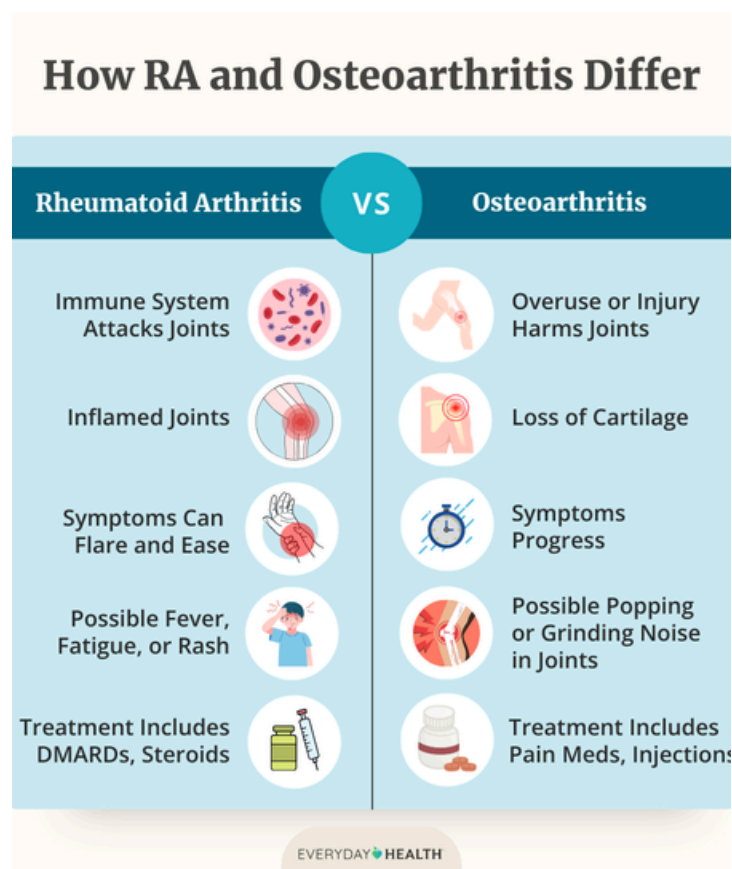
 Joint pain.	 Stiffness or reduced range of motion.
 Swelling (inflammation).	 Skin discoloration.
 Tenderness or sensitivity to touch around a joint.	 A feeling of heat or warmth near your joints

 Cleveland Clinic

*Cleveland Clinic. <https://www.modernchiropracticchicago.com/chiropractic-and-acupuncture-for-arthritis-evidence-based-approaches-to-pain-relief/>

GENERAL INFORMATION ON THE 4 MOST COMMON FORMS OF ARTHRITIS

- **Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA):** RA is a long-term (chronic) autoimmune disease where the body's immune system mistakenly attacks the joint tissues, causing inflammation and pain. While the exact trigger is unknown, the immune system produces antibodies that normally fight infections, but in RA, they attack healthy body tissues. RA can affect multiple joints, causing pain, stiffness, and swelling, and can also affect other organs. Lumps, known as rheumatoid nodules, may form anywhere in the body. May also include fatigue, fever, and changes in nails, skin, or eyes. RA can also damage the heart and lungs. Certain factors, including heredity, may play a role. **Juvenile idiopathic arthritis (JIA)**, also known as juvenile rheumatoid arthritis, is a form of arthritis in children ages 16 or younger. It causes inflammation and joint stiffness that last for more than 6 weeks. Unlike adult RA, which lasts a lifetime, children with JIA may have symptoms that come and go. Or the symptoms may go away completely.
- **Osteoarthritis:** A degenerative joint disease where the cartilage cushioning near the ends of bones wears away, causing pain, stiffness, and reduced mobility. It is the most common form of arthritis, especially in older adults, and while it's not curable, it can be managed with various treatments and lifestyle modifications. Osteoarthritis starts with the breakdown of cartilage in the joint. As the cartilage wears down, the bone ends may thicken and form bony growths (spurs). Bone spurs interfere with joint movement. Bits of bone and cartilage may float in the joint space. Fluid-filled cysts may form in the bone and limit joint movement. It can occur in any joint, but it most often affects the hands and spine and the weight-bearing joints like knees and hips. The risk factors include heredity, excess weight, and injury or overuse. Symptoms include joint pain, joint stiffness (especially after sleep or inactivity, less movement in the joint over time, and/or a grinding feeling in the joint when moved).



- **Psoriatic Arthritis:** A chronic autoimmune, inflammatory condition that primarily affects the joints, and is often linked to the skin condition psoriasis that appears as red, scaly rashes and thick, pitted fingernails. It causes joint pain, swelling, and stiffness, which can range from mild to severe and may lead to joint deformities. While it can affect any part of the body, it most commonly impacts the fingers and toes. It can also appear as Psoriatic spondylitis, arthritis of the lower back (sacroiliac sac) and the spine. It can lead to other health problems like cardiovascular disease and, in severe cases, can impact life expectancy. Factors, such as immunity, genes, and the environment, may play a role.
- **Ankylosing Spondylitis (AS):** This is a chronic inflammatory arthritis that primarily affects the spine, sacroiliac and other large joints, causing pain, stiffness, and inflammation in the back and hips. It can lead to fusion of vertebrae. Chest bones may also fuse. It's an autoimmune disease, meaning the body's immune system mistakenly attacks healthy tissues. While the exact cause is unknown, genetic factors are believed to play a role. Being male, having a family history of AS, and smoking are all risk factors.

DIAGNOSIS (*diagnostic tests*)

To assess arthritis, healthcare professionals may use various diagnostic tests including :

1. Rheumatoid Arthritis. Diagnosing RA may be difficult in the early stages. Symptoms may be very mild, and signs of the disease may not be seen on X-rays or in blood tests. Your provider will take your health history and give you a physical exam.

You may need tests, such as:

- X-rays
- Joint aspiration. For this test, a small fluid sample is taken from a swollen joint. It is done to look for signs of infection or gout.
- Nodule biopsy. Tiny tissue samples are taken to look at under a microscope. This helps to check for cancer or other abnormal cells.
- Blood tests. These tests are done to find certain antibodies called rheumatoid factor, cyclic citrullinated antibody, and other signs of RA.
- Ultrasound or MRI. These imaging tests can look for bone damage and inflammation.

2. Osteoarthritis. Diagnosing osteoarthritis involves a combination of physical exam, medical history review, and potentially, imaging tests. There's no single test, so a doctor relies on a patient's symptoms and joint examination to make a diagnosis. X-rays may be used to assess the level of joint damage, but other imaging like MRI or ultrasound can be used to evaluate soft tissues and cartilage. Doctors may also listen for crepitus (a crackling or grating sound) in the joints.

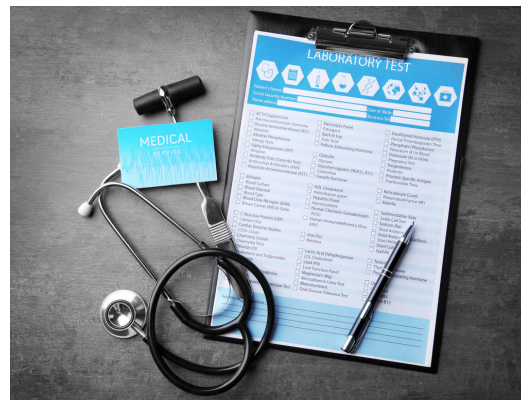
- X-rays
- MRI. An MRI can provide more detailed images of the soft tissues, including cartilage, allowing for the detection of damage earlier than with X-rays.
- Ultrasound. Ultrasound can be used to assess joint fluid, cartilage thickness, and other soft tissue changes.
- Lab tests.
 - Joint fluid analysis. A needle may be used to draw fluid from the joint to rule out other conditions like infection or gout.
 - Blood tests. Blood tests can help rule out inflammatory arthritis, such as rheumatoid arthritis.

3. Psoriatic Arthritis. Psoriatic arthritis is easier to confirm if you already have psoriasis. If you don't have the skin symptoms, diagnosis is more difficult. The process starts with a health history and a physical exam. Your healthcare provider will ask about your symptoms. You may have blood tests to check the following:

- Erythrocyte sedimentation rate (ESR or sed rate). This test looks at how quickly red blood cells fall to the bottom of a test tube. When swelling and inflammation are present, the blood's proteins clump together and become heavier than normal.
- Uric acid. High blood uric acid levels can be in psoriatic arthritis but are not used for diagnosis.
- Imaging tests. X-rays, CT scans, ultrasound, MRI, and skin biopsies may all be used to help diagnose.

4. Ankylosing Spondylitis (AS). Diagnosis starts with a health history and physical exam. You may also need:

- X-rays
- Erythrocyte sedimentation rate (ESR or sed rate) (see above description).
- Genetic testing: Genetic testing is done to find if a person carries a copy of an altered gene for a disease. The gene HLA-B27 is more likely to be found in someone with AS.



TRADITIONAL MEDICAL TREATMENT OPTIONS

1. **Rheumatoid Arthritis.** There is no known cure for RA. The treatment goal is to limit pain and inflammation, and help you retain function. You may have 1 or more types of treatments. Treatment may include:

- Medicines. Some medicines may be used for pain relief or to treat inflammation. Other types of medicines can help slow the disease from getting worse. Early treatment slows progression of the disease. Medicines should be managed by a rheumatologist.
- Splints. Splints may be used to help protect the joints and make weak joints stronger.
- Physical Therapy.
- Joint replacement (arthroplasty)

2. **Osteoarthritis.** Osteoarthritis (OA) treatment focuses on relieving pain and improving joint function through a combination of lifestyle changes, physical therapy, medications, and in some cases, surgery. The goals of treatment are to manage pain, improve mobility, and maintain an active lifestyle.

- Weight Management: Losing weight can significantly reduce stress on weight-bearing joints.
- Exercise: Low-impact activities like walking, swimming, and cycling, along with strengthening exercises, can help improve flexibility, reduce pain, and build muscle strength.
- Activity Modification: Adapting activities to avoid exacerbating pain is crucial.
- Heat and Cold Therapy: Heat can relax muscles and increase circulation; cold can reduce inflammation.
- Physical and Occupational Therapy: These types of therapy may help to reduce joint pain, improve joint flexibility, and reduce joint strain.
- Assistive Devices: Braces, shoe inserts, canes, and walkers can help support joints and improve mobility.
- Medications: Pain relief medications like over-the-counter pain relievers or prescription medications may be used. These may be taken by mouth or rubbed on the skin.
- Joint surgery: Surgery may be needed to repair or replace a severely damaged joint.

3. **Psoriatic Arthritis.** Focus on managing symptoms and preventing progression of the disease. Treatment will depend on symptoms, age, general health, and on the severity of the condition. Both the skin condition and the joint inflammation are treated. Early diagnosis and treatment help prevent joint damage. Medicines include NSAIDs for pain and inflammation, corticosteroids for inflammation, disease-modifying antirheumatic drugs (DMARDs) to slow disease, and immunosuppressives to decrease inflammation. Other treatments may include:

- Exercise: Strengthening and stretching muscles supporting the joint and improving fitness.
- Heat and cold
- Occupational and/or physical therapy
- Management of skin rash
- Splints
- Ultraviolet (UV) light treatment
- Surgery to fix or replace a damaged joint

4. **Ankylosing Spondylitis (AS).** Manage pain, reduce inflammation, and improve mobility and quality of life.

- Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) and/or DMARDs (see above information)
- Corticosteroids to relieve severe symptoms and Sulfasalazine to reduce gastro-intestinal issues.
- Anti-TNF (tumor necrosis factor) inhibitors: Biologics that block TNF, a protein involved in inflammation
- IL-17 (interleukin-17) inhibitors: these biologics target IL-17, another inflammatory protein
- JAK inhibitors: these medications block JAK, an enzyme involved in inflammation
- Physical therapy, exercise and posture correction.
- Diet and smoking cessation.

THE ROLE OF CHIROPRACTIC CARE IN TREATING STRESS

Chiropractic care can play a beneficial role in managing arthritis, offering relief from pain and improving joint function, particularly in osteoarthritis. By addressing joint alignment and mobility, chiropractic treatments can reduce inflammation and pain, allowing individuals to maintain an active lifestyle and potentially reduce reliance on pain medications. While not a cure for all types of arthritis, chiropractic care can be a valuable part of a holistic approach to managing the condition.*

Chiropractic physicians provide relief through techniques that may include:

- **Manual Manipulation:** Chiropractors use manual adjustments to realign joints and improve their movement.
 - Chiropractors use spinal adjustments to reduce pressure on nerves and alleviate tension in the body.
 - Adjustments promote relaxation, which is crucial for managing arthritis
- **Soft Tissue Therapy:** Involves relaxing tight muscles, releasing fascial tension and improving circulation.
- **Acupuncture:** The primary benefit of acupuncture is pain relief. Acupuncture stimulates the release of endorphins, the body's natural painkillers, and can modulate pain pathways in the nervous system. Acupuncture reduces inflammation, particularly in autoimmune forms like rheumatoid arthritis.



Benefits for Arthritis Patients May Include:

1. Improved Joint Mobility

- Chiropractic adjustments can help restore movement in joints that have become stiff due to arthritis.
- Improved mobility reduces compensatory strain on surrounding joints and muscles.

2. Pain Reduction

- Adjustments help realign the spine and joints, which relieve pressure on nerves and reduce inflammation
- Chiropractic care can help decrease reliance on pain medication over time.

3. Muscle Relaxation & Reduced Tension

- Arthritis can lead to muscle guarding or spasms as the body tries to protect sore joints.
- Chiropractors use soft tissue techniques (e.g., massage, trigger point therapy) to improve flexibility.

4. Posture & Alignment

- Poor posture and spinal misalignment can worsen joint stress and accelerate degenerative changes.
- Chiropractors help correct posture, which can redistribute pressure more evenly across the body.

5. Holistic Lifestyle Guidance

- Chiropractors provide nutritional, exercise and other recommendations tailored to arthritis management.
- This comprehensive approach can promote long-term joint health and daily comfort.

6. Non-Pharmaceutical Support

- Chiropractic care offers a drug-free option that complements traditional care.
- Chiropractors work alongside other healthcare providers as part of a multidisciplinary management plan.

7. Custom Treatment Plans

- Chiropractors tailor treatment to the type of arthritis (e.g., osteoarthritis vs. rheumatoid)
- They use gentler techniques for inflamed or fragile joints and may avoid areas with severe degeneration

*Modern Chiropractic Chicago. December 19, 2024. <https://www.modernchiropracticchicago.com/chiropractic-and-acupuncture-for-arthritis-evidence-based-approaches-to-pain-relief/>

PROGNOSIS *(The likely outcome or course of a disease; the chance of recovery or recurrence)*

The prognosis for arthritis varies greatly depending on the type and severity of the condition, as well as individual factors. While some people with osteoarthritis or rheumatoid arthritis may experience mild symptoms with effective management, others may face progressive joint damage and decreased function. Early diagnosis and treatment are crucial for slowing disease progression and improving quality of life.



1. **Rheumatoid Arthritis.** With treatment, many people with RA can live healthy, active lives.

- RA is an inflammatory disease that can cause significant joint damage and functional impairment if not treated effectively.
- While not a cure, some people with RA can achieve remission, meaning their symptoms are significantly reduced or absent.
- RA requires ongoing management to control symptoms, prevent flare-ups, and maintain function.
- RA can increase the risk of early death, particularly due to cardiovascular complications, although this risk can be reduced with effective treatment.

2. **Osteoarthritis.** OA is progressive, but the rate of progression varies, and not all cases lead to worsening symptoms over time. Osteoarthritis can qualify individuals for disability benefits if it significantly impacts their ability to work.

- OA typically requires lifelong management of symptoms, which may include pain relief, maintaining activity, and preventing disability.
- Maintaining activity is important, even with pain, as inactivity can increase the risk of other health issues.

3. **Psoriatic Arthritis.** The prognosis for psoriatic arthritis varies. While it's a chronic condition with no cure, early diagnosis and treatment can significantly improve quality of life and reduce the risk of long-term joint damage. For many, symptoms are manageable with medication and lifestyle changes, allowing for periods of remission. However, in some cases, psoriatic arthritis can lead to severe disability and joint damage.

- Some individuals experience mild symptoms and minimal impact, while others may have severe and debilitating disease.
- Research suggests that people with psoriatic arthritis may have a slightly shorter life expectancy, potentially due to increased risk of cardiovascular disease and other co-morbidities.
- Psoriatic arthritis can be associated with other health conditions like heart disease, obesity, and diabetes, which can impact overall health and life expectancy.
- Individuals may also be at higher risk for mental health conditions like anxiety and depression.

4. **Ankylosing Spondylitis (AS).** The prognosis for ankylosing spondylitis (AS) is variable, with many individuals maintaining a good functional capacity and leading normal, productive lives, despite the chronic nature of the disease. However, some individuals experience more progressive disease with significant disability, and a few may have reduced life expectancy due to complications.

- Some individuals respond well to treatment and experience periods of remission, while others experience more persistent and active disease.
- Complications like uveitis, cardiovascular or pulmonary problems can negatively impact prognosis.
- Inflammation can sometimes affect other organs, such as the eyes, heart, and lungs.*

*Johns Hopkins Medicine. <https://www.modernchiropracticchicago.com/chiropractic-and-acupuncture-for-arthritis-evidence-based-approaches-to-pain-relief/>

THE ROLE OF VITAMINS AND SUPPLEMENTS IN ARTHRITIS SUPPORT

Several vitamins and supplements are commonly used to support joint health and potentially alleviate arthritis symptoms. Prominent options include omega-3 fatty acids, turmeric (curcumin), glucosamine and chondroitin, vitamin D, and SAmE (S-adenosyl-methionine). These supplements are often chosen for their anti-inflammatory, cartilage-protective, and pain-relieving properties.



Here's a more detailed look at some popular supplements:

- **Omega-3 Fatty Acids:** Found in fish oil and flaxseed oil, omega-3s are known for their anti-inflammatory effects, which can help reduce joint pain and stiffness, especially in rheumatoid arthritis.
- **Turmeric (Curcumin):** The active compound in turmeric, curcumin, has demonstrated anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties. Studies suggest it can help reduce pain and inflammation in osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis.
- **Glucosamine and Chondroitin:** These are building blocks of cartilage, the tissue that cushions joints. Supplements containing glucosamine and chondroitin are commonly used to help maintain cartilage health and potentially reduce pain and stiffness in osteoarthritis.
- **Vitamin D:** Vitamin D is crucial for bone health and may play a role in reducing pain and inflammation in arthritis. Many people with arthritis are deficient in vitamin D, and supplementation may be beneficial. People who have kidney disease, bone disease, certain cancers, or calcium disorders should talk to their doctors before taking a vitamin D supplement.*
- **SAmE (S-adenosyl-methionine):** This naturally occurring compound is involved in various bodily functions, including joint health. Some studies suggest SAmE may help reduce pain and improve joint mobility in osteoarthritis.
- **Other Supplements:** Other supplements like Ashwagandha for symptom and stress relief, and collagen for promoting natural collagen production may also be considered.

Important Considerations: It's crucial to consult with a healthcare professional before starting any new supplement regimen, especially if you have pre-existing conditions or are taking medications. They can help determine the right supplements and dosages for your individual needs.

If you experience any arthritis symptoms, it's important to consult with a doctor or other qualified healthcare professional for diagnosis and treatment.

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*Vad, Vijay, MD. Arthritis-Health. 01/13/2020. *Modern Chiropractic Chicago. December 19, 2024. <https://www.modernchiropracticchicago.com/chiropractic-and-acupuncture-for-arthritis-evidence-based-approaches-to-pain-relief/>