

Osteoarthritis of Hip: Patient Information

What is Osteoarthritis?

The bone surfaces within a joint are covered with smooth cartilage that allows the bones to move smoothly over each other.

A joint also contains a small amount of fluid (synovial fluid) that helps lubricate the joint (like oil in an engine).

Osteoarthritis is the most common form of arthritis affecting 8.5 million people in the UK. It develops gradually over time, causing joints to become stiff and painful. It can affect any joint but commonly affects the hands, knees, hips, feet and spine.

In joints with osteoarthritis, the joint cartilage becomes damaged and worn. The bone tissue next to the cartilage can also be affected and bony growths can develop around the joint edges.

These growths are called osteophytes and may be seen on X-rays. The joints and the tissues around the joints can also become inflamed. This inflammation is called synovitis.

Factors that may play a role in the development of osteoarthritis include:

- **Age.** Osteoarthritis becomes more common with increasing age. It may be that the state of the blood supply to the joint and the state of the natural mechanisms of repair become less efficient in some people as they become older.
- **Genetics.** There may be some inherited tendency for osteoarthritis to develop in some people.
- **Obesity.** Knee and hip osteoarthritis are more likely to develop, or be more severe, in obese people. This is because there is an increased load on the joints and a potential for more joint damage.
- **Your sex.** Women are more likely to develop osteoarthritis than men.
- **Previous joint injury, damage or deformity.** For example, this may include previous joint infection, a previous fracture (break in the bone) around a joint, or congenital hip problems such as dislocation

What are the symptoms of osteoarthritis of the hip?

- Pain, particularly in the groin.
- Stiffness and limitation in full movement of the joint is typical. The stiffness tends to be worse first thing in the morning but tends to loosen up after half an hour or so.
- You may have poor mobility and problems walking as the osteoarthritis worsens.
- In severe arthritis patients have a classical limp. This may make you more likely to have a fall.

- If you have bad osteoarthritis that affects your hip, you may also have difficulty in putting on shoes and socks and getting in and out of a car.
- In women, restricted movement of the hip can make having sex difficult and painful.
- No symptoms may occur. Quite a number of people have X-ray changes that indicate some degree of osteoarthritis but have no, or only very mild, symptoms.
The opposite can also be true. That is, you may have quite severe symptoms but with only minor changes seen on the X-ray.
- Some people with osteoarthritis may develop other problems because of their symptoms. For example, pain can affect sleep for some people. Mobility problems may affect your ability to work and carry our family duties. Some people may get down or even depressed because of their pain and other symptoms.

Do I need any tests?

An X-ray is commonly done to confirm the presence of osteoarthritis in the hip and assess its severity.

In some circumstances your GP may arrange blood tests to exclude other forms of arthritis.

How Can I prevent osteoarthritis of the hip?

Whilst we cannot control factors such as ageing, our family genetics and congenital problems or injuries which occur through accidents, a healthy active lifestyle will help minimize the chances of developing osteoarthritis.

Keeping active will maintain strong muscles around the joint to support and stabilize the joint and will help maintain joint mobility.

Avoiding being overweight will also reduce strain and wear on your joints including your hips.

General measures to help treat osteoarthritis

Exercise

If possible, exercise regularly. As stated above this helps to strengthen the muscles around affected joints, to keep you fit, and to maintain a good range joint movement. Swimming is ideal as it is not weight bearing but any exercise is better than none. Many people can manage a regular walk.

Weight control

If you are overweight, try to lose some weight. Even a modest weight loss can make quite a difference.

Shoe insoles

Walking aids

If you have osteoarthritis of your hip or knee, when walking, try using a cane (walking

stick). Hold it in the hand on the opposite side of the body to the affected joint. This takes some pressure off the affected joint and helps to ease symptoms in some cases.

Physiotherapy

Sometimes advice or treatment from a physiotherapist can be helpful.

Simple painkillers

- **Paracetamol**

Paracetamol is the common medicine used to treat OA. It often works well to ease pain. It is best to take it regularly to keep pain away, rather than now and again when pain flares up. A normal adult dose is two 500 mg tablets, four times a day. It usually has little in the way of side-effects, and you can take paracetamol long-term without it losing its effect.

- **Co-codamol**

Co-codamol is a combination of paracetamol 500mg and varying amounts of another painkiller, codeine. This makes it stronger than paracetamol alone but the codeine can cause side effects such as drowsiness or constipation

Anti-inflammatory painkillers

Anti-inflammatory painkillers, of which there are a number of different brands, can be very effective and can be used in conjunction with paracetamol or co-codamol.

Unfortunately they do have side-effects such as gastrointestinal upset and irritation and kidney damage and so should be avoided by some people (if in doubt check with your pharmacist or GP)

Other therapies

Some people have found that transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulator (TENS) machines help to ease pain from osteoarthritis. Acupuncture may also help to ease symptoms in some cases.

Surgery for osteoarthritis

Most people with osteoarthritis do not have it badly enough to need surgery. However, osteoarthritis of a joint may become severe in some cases.

Some joints can be replaced with artificial joints of which there are numerous kinds. Hip replacement surgery has become a standard treatment for severe osteoarthritis. However, like any operation, joint replacement surgery is not without risk.