

# ARTHRITIS AND YOU

Information for Multicultural Communities



**U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
National Institutes of Health**

**National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases**

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# Arthritis and You

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INFORMATION FOR MULTICULTURAL  
COMMUNITIES

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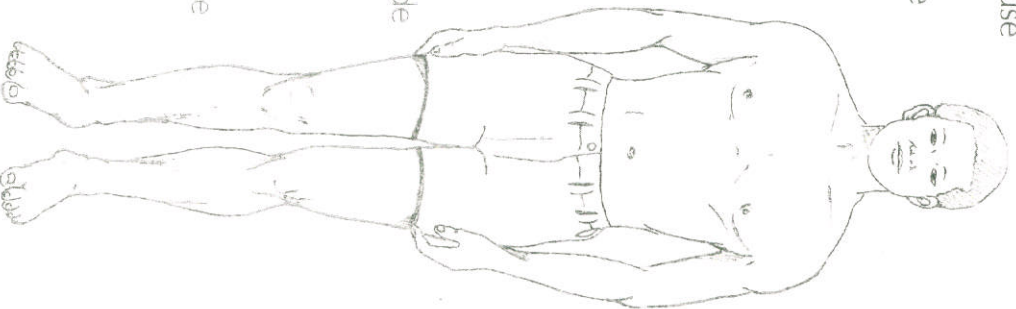
## What Is Arthritis?

Many people start to feel pain and stiffness in their bodies over time. Sometimes their hands or knees or hips get sore and are hard to move. These people may have arthritis (ar-THRY-tis).

Arthritis is an illness that can cause pain and swelling in your joints. Over time, the joint can become severely damaged. Joints are places where two bones meet, such as your elbow or knee. Some kinds of arthritis can cause problems in other organs, such as your eyes, or in your chest. It can affect your skin, too.

These problems may be caused by inflammation (in-flah-MAY-shun), a swelling that can include pain or redness. They are telling you that something is wrong.

Some people may worry that arthritis means they won't be able to work or take care of their children and their family. Others think that you just have to accept things like arthritis.



It's true that arthritis can be painful. But there are things you can do to feel better. This booklet tells you some facts about arthritis and gives you some ideas about what to do, so you can keep doing the things you want to do.

There are several kinds of arthritis. The two most common ones are rheumatoid (ROO-mah-toyd) arthritis and osteoarthritis (AH-stee-oh-ar-THRY-tis).

Osteoarthritis is the most common form of arthritis. This is the form that usually comes with age and most often affects the fingers, knees, and hips. Sometimes osteoarthritis follows an injury to a joint. For example, a young person might hurt his knee badly playing soccer. Then, years after the knee has apparently healed, he might get arthritis in his knee joint.

Rheumatoid arthritis happens when the body's own defense system doesn't work properly. It affects joints, bones, and organs—often the hands and feet. You may feel sick or tired, and you may have a fever.

Other conditions can also cause arthritis. Some include:

- Gout, in which crystals build up in the joints. It usually affects the big toe.
- Lupus (LOOP-us), in which the body's defense system can harm the joints, the heart, the skin, the kidneys, and other organs.
- Viral hepatitis (VY-rul HEP-ah-TY-tis), in which an infection of the liver can cause arthritis.

## Do I Have Arthritis?

Pain is the way your body tells you that something is wrong. Most kinds of arthritis cause pain in your joints. You might have trouble moving around. Some kinds of arthritis can affect different parts of your body. So, along with the arthritis, you may:

- Have a fever.
- Lose weight.
- Have trouble breathing.
- Get a rash or itch.

These symptoms may also be signs of other illnesses.





## What Can I Do?

Go see a doctor. Many people use herbs or medicines that you can buy without a prescription for pain. You should tell your doctor if you do. Only a doctor can tell if you have arthritis or a related condition and what to do about it. It's important not to wait.

You'll need to tell the doctor how you feel and where you hurt. The doctor will examine you and may take x rays (pictures) of your bones or joints. The x rays don't hurt and aren't dangerous. You may also have to give a little blood for tests that will help the doctor decide if you have arthritis and what kind you have.



## How Will the Doctor Help?

After the doctor knows what kind of arthritis you have, he or she will talk with you about the best way to treat it. The doctor may give you a prescription for medicine that will help with the pain, stiffness, and inflammation. Health insurance or public assistance may help you pay for the medicine, doctor visits, tests, and x rays.

## How Should I Use Arthritis Medicine?

Before you leave the doctor's office, make sure you ask about the best way to take the medicine the doctor prescribes. For example, you may need to take some medicines with milk, or you may need to eat something just before or after taking them, to make sure they don't upset your stomach.

You should also ask how often to take the medicine or to put cream on the spots that bother you. Creams might make your skin and joints feel better. Sometimes, though, they can make your skin burn or break out in a rash. If this happens, call the doctor.

## What If I Still Hurt?

Sometimes you might still have pain after using your medicine. Here are some things to try:

- Take a warm shower.
- Do some gentle stretching exercises.
- Use an ice pack on the sore area.
- Rest the sore joint.

If **you** still hurt after using your medicine correctly and **doing** one or more of these things, call your doctor.

**Another** kind of medicine might work better for you.

**Some** people can also benefit from surgery, such as joint **replacem**ent.



## You Can Feel Better!

Arthritis can damage your joints, organs, and skin. There are things you can do to keep the damage from getting worse. They might also make you feel better.

- Try to keep your weight down. Too much weight can make your knees and hips hurt.
- Exercise. Moving all of your joints will help you. The doctor or nurse can show you how to move more easily. Going for a walk every day will help, too.
- Take your medicines when and how you are supposed to. They can help reduce pain and stiffness.
- Try taking a warm shower in the morning.
- See your doctor regularly.
- Seek information that can help you.



## For More Help

For more information on arthritis and musculoskeletal and skin diseases, contact any of the following organizations:

### **National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases (NIAMS) Information**

#### **Clearinghouse**

National Institutes of Health

1 AMS Circle

Bethesda, MD 20892-3675

(301) 495-4484

(877) 22-NIAMS (226-4267) (free of charge)

TTY: (301) 565-2966

Fax: (301) 718-6366

[www.niams.nih.gov](http://www.niams.nih.gov)

The NIAMS, a part of the Department of Health and Human Services' National Institutes of Health (NIH), leads the Federal Government research effort in arthritis and musculoskeletal and skin diseases in the United States. The National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases Information Clearinghouse is a public service sponsored by the NIAMS.

### **Arthritis Foundation**

1330 West Peachtree Street, Suite 100  
Atlanta, GA 30309  
(800) 283-7800 (free of charge)  
(404) 872-7100 or your local chapter listed in the  
telephone book.  
[www.arthritis.org](http://www.arthritis.org)

The Arthritis Foundation is the major voluntary organization devoted to supporting arthritis research and providing education and other services to people with arthritis. This foundation publishes free pamphlets on arthritis, as well as arthritis self-help books in English and Spanish.

### **American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons**

P.O. Box 2058  
Des Plaines, IL 60017  
(800) 824-BONE (2663) (free of charge)  
[www.aaos.org](http://www.aaos.org)

The academy provides education and self-help services for orthopaedic surgeons (doctors) and other health providers. It supports improved patient care and informs the public about the science of orthopaedics (bone and joint health).

**American College of Rheumatology**

1800 Century Place, Suite 250

Atlanta, GA 30345

(404) 633-3777

Fax: (404) 633-1870

[www.rheumatology.org](http://www.rheumatology.org)

This association provides referrals to doctors and health professionals who work on arthritis, rheumatic diseases, and related conditions. The association also provides educational materials and guidelines.

**NIH Osteoporosis and Related Bone Diseases~National Resource Center**

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Phone: 202-223-0344 or 800-624-BONE  
(2663) (free of charge)

TTY: 202-466-4315

Fax: 202-293-2356

[www.osteoporosis.org](http://www.osteoporosis.org)

E-mail: [NIAMSBoneInfo@mail.nih.gov](mailto:NIAMSBoneInfo@mail.nih.gov)

The NIH Osteoporosis and Related Bone Diseases~National Resource Center provides patients, health professionals, and the public with an important link to resources and information on osteoporosis and other metabolic bone diseases.



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**The mission of the National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases (NIAMS), a part of the Department of Health and Human Services' National Institutes of Health (NIH), is to support research into the causes, treatment, and prevention of arthritis and musculoskeletal and skin diseases, the training of basic and clinical scientists to carry out this research, and the dissemination of information on research progress in these diseases. The National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases Information**

**Clearinghouse is a public service sponsored by the NIAMS that provides health information and information sources. Additional information can be found on the NIAMS Web site at [www.niams.nih.gov](http://www.niams.nih.gov).**

## **Do You Have Arthritis or a Related Condition?**

You may be able to help scientists  
learn more about these conditions.

For information about research projects  
near your home, call the

**NIAMS**

**Information Clearinghouse  
(301) 495-4484**

**You could make a difference!**