



Live Well, Work Well

Health and wellness tips for your work, home and life—brought to you by the insurance professionals at Clarke & Company Benefits, LLC



OSTEOARTHRITIS

Osteoarthritis, a degenerative joint disease, is the most common type of arthritis, affecting more than 32.5 million Americans.

What Is Osteoarthritis?

It is characterized by the breakdown of cartilage in the part of the joint that cushions the ends of bones. When cartilage breaks down, bones rub together causing pain and loss of movement. Osteoarthritis most often affects middle-aged and older adults. It can range from mild to severe, and most often occurs in the hands and weight-bearing joints such as the knees, hips, feet and back.

What Causes Osteoarthritis?

The following factors can contribute to osteoarthritis:

- **Age:** Your risk of developing arthritis increases as you age.
- **Gender:** In general, arthritis occurs more frequently in women than in men.
- **Obesity:** Obesity increases your chances of getting osteoarthritis, particularly for women, where a link has been found connecting obesity and the development of arthritis of the knee. However, with diet and exercise you can help reduce your weight and minimize the stress on weight-bearing joints such as the knees.
- **Work factors:** Repetitive injuries and physical traumas at work can contribute to the development of arthritis.

Symptoms of Osteoarthritis

Osteoarthritis usually develops slowly. In its early stage, joints may ache after physical work or exercise.

However, about a third of those actually report pain or other symptoms. For those that do experience symptoms, the most common warning signs include:

- Steady or intermittent pain in a joint.
- Stiffness that tends to follow periods of inactivity, such as sleeping or sitting.
- Swelling or tenderness in one or more joints.
- Crunching feeling or the sound of bones rubbing together when the joint is used.

Treating Osteoarthritis

Generally, osteoarthritis is treated by focusing on decreasing pain and improving joint movement and may include the following:

- Exercise to keep joints flexible and improve muscle strength.
- Medications to control pain. Acetaminophen is used for mild pain while steroid injections in the joints can relieve more severe pain.
- Heat and cold therapy for temporary pain relief.
- Joint protection to prevent strain or stress on painful joints.
- Surgery, to relieve chronic pain in damaged joints.



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