

SHARE THE WELLNESS TIP



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Adding Up Aches & Pains



There isn't just one form of arthritis. In fact, there are more than 100 different types of the disease, including gout and rheumatoid arthritis and the more common osteoarthritis. Arthritis literally means joint inflammation. Although joint inflammation describes a symptom or sign rather than a specific diagnosis, the term "arthritis" is often used to refer to any disorder that affects the joints. Although there is no cure for arthritis, certain lifestyle changes and treatments can help ease symptoms and prevent more damage to the joints. If you have pain, swelling or stiffness in your joints, it might be time to go to the doctor to find out if you have osteoarthritis.

There's no single test to diagnose osteoarthritis. Instead, doctors use several methods to identify it and rule out other health problems that could be causing your discomfort. Here are common steps doctors take to diagnose osteoarthritis.

Questions Your Doctor May Ask You About Joint Pain

First, your doctor will ask you questions about your symptoms and medical history. Your doctor may ask:

- Is the pain in one or more joints?
- When do you have pain and how long does it last?
- When did you first start to have pain?
- Do you feel better or worse after activity?
- Have you had any sickness or accidents that might be causing your pain?
- Do you or a close family member have a history of arthritis or rheumatic disease?
- What medicines do you take?

A Physical Exam for Osteoarthritis

After talking with you about your symptoms, your doctor may:

- Check your general health and muscle strength
- Examine joints that bother you
- Observe how you walk, bend, and do other activities

An X-ray to Evaluate Your Joints

To find out what type of arthritis you have and the extent of damage to your joints, your doctor may order an X-ray. An X-ray can show:

- Bits of bone that grow on the edges of your joints, called bone spurs
- Damage to your bones
- Loss of the hard, slippery coating on the ends of your bones, called cartilage

Keep in mind, though, that early osteoarthritis may not be visible on an X-ray, and that how severe your osteoarthritis is doesn't always reflect how much pain you have. Your doctor may also order an MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) scan if you have pain, if the extent of damage appears minor on the X-ray, and if the X-ray suggests that you might have damage to other tissues of the joint.

Other Tests to Evaluate Your Joints

To rule out other causes of your symptoms, your doctor may order blood tests or check the fluid in your joints for signs of infection or other problems.