

OSTEOARTHRITIS OF THE HIP

What Is Osteoarthritis?

Osteoarthritis (degenerative joint disease) is an illness in which joints become red and swollen (inflamed), painful, and stiff. Most often, the knees, hips, and spine are involved, but other joints, such as those in the hands, can also show signs. These joints contain cartilage, the substance that cushions bones that touch. During osteoarthritis, cartilage breaks down and loses the ability to cushion the joints. In the hips, the protective barrier between the thigh bone (femur) and the hip bone is lost. In advanced osteoarthritis, cartilage in the joints is completely worn away.

What Causes Osteoarthritis of the Hips?

Osteoarthritis is caused by aging, injury, trauma, and other factors. Osteoarthritis is very common when people reach their 70's. It can occur at a younger age in overweight people. It affects both men and women.

What Are the Symptoms of Osteoarthritis of the Hip?

Osteoarthritis develops gradually. The first symptom may be pain, usually in the front part of the thigh or groin. Pain gets worse with exercise and stops during rest. Sometimes, pain travels to the buttocks or lower part of the thigh. Morning stiffness may occur but goes away during the day. As osteoarthritis gets worse, joints become less flexible. The hips become tender, and a grating sensation may be felt during movement.

How Is Osteoarthritis of the Hip Diagnosed?

The doctor's diagnosis is based on symptoms and a physical examination. The most important sign of early disease is an inability to turn or rotate the leg toward the center of the body. The doctor may also take an x-ray of the hip joints or do more tests to rule out other illnesses that can affect joints. Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) of the hip may be done if surgery is being considered.

How Is Osteoarthritis of the Hip Treated?

Treatment goals are to control pain and preserve mobility. The type of treatment depends on lifestyle and the degree of osteoarthritis. Keeping to a healthy weight is very important. Mild osteoarthritis may need only exercises to protect the hip joints and sometimes medicine for pain. The doctor may prescribe non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAID). They reduce pain and swelling (inflammation) but can have side effects (e.g., stomach pain and bleeding, or kidney, liver, and heart problems). Over-the-counter products, such as glucosamine and chondroitin, are popular but have not been proven effective. Heating pads, warm soaks, and cold packs may help relieve symptoms. The doctor may prescribe a physical therapy program and medicines (pain relievers and anti-inflammatory drugs) for more severe disease. Low-impact exercises, especially swimming, may improve muscle strength. Devices such as canes or walkers may minimize stress on the hips. Correcting leg length differences with a heel lift may help. If these approaches don't work, hip replacement surgery may be offered as a last resort.

Disclaimer: All material on this brochure is provided for general information purposes only and should not be considered medical advice or consultation.

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DOs and DON'Ts in Managing Osteoarthritis of the Hip:

- **DO** take your medicines as prescribed.
- **DO** use physical therapy to maintain muscle strength and joint flexibility.
- **DO** make lifestyle changes to reduce discomfort and stress on affected hip joints.
- **DO** lose weight if you are overweight.
- **DON'T** take part in work or sport activities that stress your hips.

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