

# Ankle Osteoarthritis

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## KEY POINTS

- Ankle osteoarthritis is a disease in which the cartilage in your ankle joint breaks down, causing joint irritation, swelling, and pain.
  - Treatment helps control symptoms and may include exercise, medicines, walking aids, or surgery.
  - Try to keep a healthy weight. Losing some weight can reduce the stress on your joints. Eat a variety of healthy foods and ask your healthcare provider what type of physical activity is best for you. If you smoke or use e-cigarettes, try to quit.
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## What is osteoarthritis?

Ankle osteoarthritis is a disease in which the cartilage in your ankle joint breaks down. Cartilage is tissue that lines and cushions the surface of joints. It covers the ends of bones and allows free movement of joints. If joint cartilage gets rough or wears away, the roughened cartilage or bone surfaces grind against each other. Your ankle gets deformed and swollen. Sometimes the joint damage causes abnormal growths of bone, called spurs.

Ankle osteoarthritis is a lifelong problem that can get worse over time. However, you can relieve symptoms and prevent or slow down joint damage by following your healthcare provider's treatment plan and taking care of yourself.

## What is the cause?

The exact cause of osteoarthritis is not known. Things that may cause or contribute to ankle arthritis are:

- Injuries to your ankle such as sprains or fractures that can damage cartilage are a common cause
- Aging. Osteoarthritis slowly gets worse as you get older. Symptoms are usually not noticed until middle age.
- Too much wear on ankle joints due to flat feet, high arches, overuse, or being overweight
- Genes you have inherited. Genes are inside each cell of your body and are passed from parents to children. They contain the information that tells your body how to develop and work. A family history of osteoarthritis can increase your risk of having osteoarthritis.

## What are the symptoms?

Symptoms may include:

- Mild to severe pain in your ankle, which may happen only with activity at first, but may become constant over time
- Creaking or crunching sound in your ankle
- Swelling, stiffness, or limited movement of your ankle, especially in the morning
- Weakness in muscles around your ankle caused by not moving as much due to pain
- Changes in the shape of the joint if the cartilage wears away and the bones themselves start wearing down

## **How is it diagnosed?**

Your healthcare provider will ask about your symptoms, medical history, any injuries to your ankle, and examine you. If there is a question about what type of arthritis you have or how severe your osteoarthritis is, other tests may include:

- X-rays
- Blood tests
- Joint aspiration, which uses a needle to take fluid from a joint for testing

You may have other tests or scans to check for other possible causes of your symptoms.

## **How is it treated?**

Treatment depends on how severe your ankle arthritis is, how much it limits your activities, and your general health.

### **Medicine**

- Nonprescription pain medicine, such as acetaminophen or nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), may help relieve pain. NSAIDs are available in pills, creams, and patches. Read the label and take as directed. Unless recommended by your healthcare provider, you should not take these medicines for more than 10 days.
  - Acetaminophen may cause liver damage or other problems. Unless recommended by your provider, don't take more than 3000 milligrams (mg) in 24 hours. To make sure you don't take too much, check other medicines you take to see if they also contain acetaminophen. Ask your provider if you need to avoid drinking alcohol while taking this medicine.
  - NSAIDs, such as ibuprofen, naproxen, ketoprofen, and aspirin, may cause stomach bleeding and other problems. These risks increase with age.
- Steroids or other medicine injected into a painful joint

### **Physical activity**

Three types of physical activity may help:

- Range-of-motion exercises are gentle stretching exercises that help you improve movement of a joint. Examples include low-speed bike riding, tai chi, and yoga. Range-of-motion exercises help you keep or improve your flexibility and relieve stiffness.

- Strengthening exercise, such as weight training, makes muscles and tendons stronger. Strong muscles and tendons support joints better. You will be able to move more easily and with less pain.
- Aerobic or endurance exercise at a moderate pace, such as walking or bicycle riding, improves your overall health and helps control your weight. Exercise in a warm swimming pool is a very helpful option. The water supports your weight while you move, and the warmth helps improve joint movement. It's best to avoid high-impact activities such as tennis or running.

Talk with your healthcare provider before you start an exercise program. Too much exercise too soon or not warming up enough may make arthritis worse. Your provider may refer you to a physical therapist to design a program that is right for you.

### **Surgery**

Over time, your ankle arthritis may reach the point where your provider recommends surgery. Several kinds of surgery may be done:

- Arthroscopy is a type of surgery done with a small scope inserted into your joint. Your provider can look directly at your joint and make helpful repairs, such as removing bone spurs or loose pieces of cartilage, without having to cut open the joint.
- Ankle fusion is a procedure to join (fuse) the bones in your ankle with bone grafts or metal pins, plates, or rods. Your ankle will no longer move after the procedure, but it can be helpful with relieving pain.
- Ankle replacement surgery may be done if your ankle is severely damaged. The painful ankle joint is removed and replaced with an artificial ankle joint.

### **Other treatments**

- Some people seem to benefit from the natural remedies glucosamine and chondroitin sulfate. You may not be able to take glucosamine if you're allergic to shellfish. Talk with your healthcare provider about this.
- Rubbing deep-heat creams on a painful joint can give short-term relief. Putting an ice pack on the joint once or twice a day can also help relieve pain. See which works best for you. Some people get relief by alternating heat and cold packs. Hot paraffin foot baths may help.
- Your provider may recommend that you use a walking aid such as a cane or walker.
- Wearing a brace can reduce the motion in your ankle. Some braces help transfer your body weight to your knee to take pressure off your ankle, but they can be bulky to wear.
- Ask your provider if you should try shoes with a rounded sole, called rocker shoes. These shoes allow your foot to roll as you take a step, which may relieve pressure on your ankle.

## How can I take care of myself?

- Follow the full course of treatment prescribed by your healthcare provider.
- Rest your ankle when it feels swollen or painful.
- Try to keep a healthy weight. If you are overweight, lose weight. Losing some weight can reduce the stress on your ankle.
- Eat a variety of healthy foods. Ask your provider about the benefits of talking to a dietitian to learn what you need in a healthy diet.
- If you smoke or use e-cigarettes, try to quit. Talk to your healthcare provider about ways to quit smoking.
- Try to get at least 7 to 9 hours of sleep each night.
- Join a support group or take classes on how to manage your arthritis.
- Ask your healthcare provider:
  - How and when you will get your test results
  - If there are activities you should avoid and when you can return to normal activities
  - What symptoms or problems you should watch for and what to do if you have them
- Make sure you know when you should come back for a checkup. Keep all appointments for provider visits or tests.

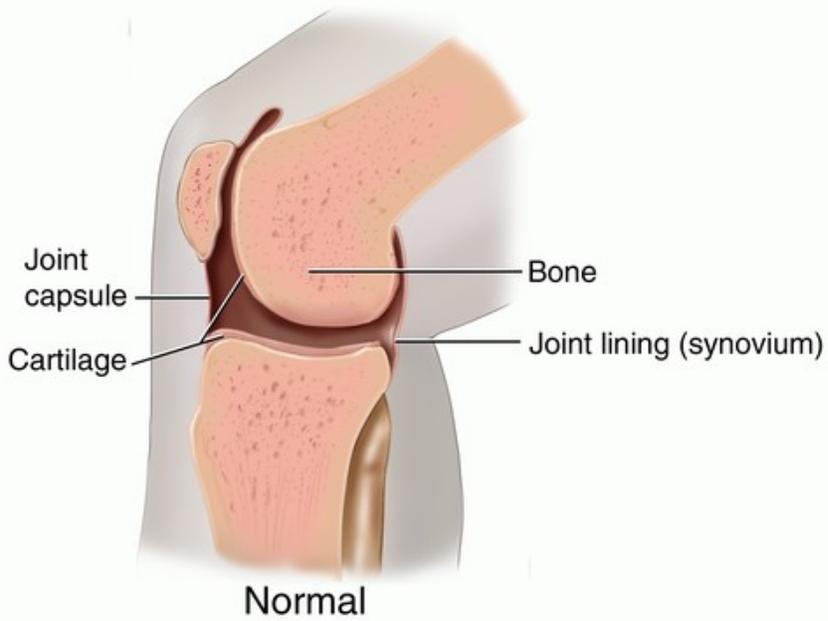
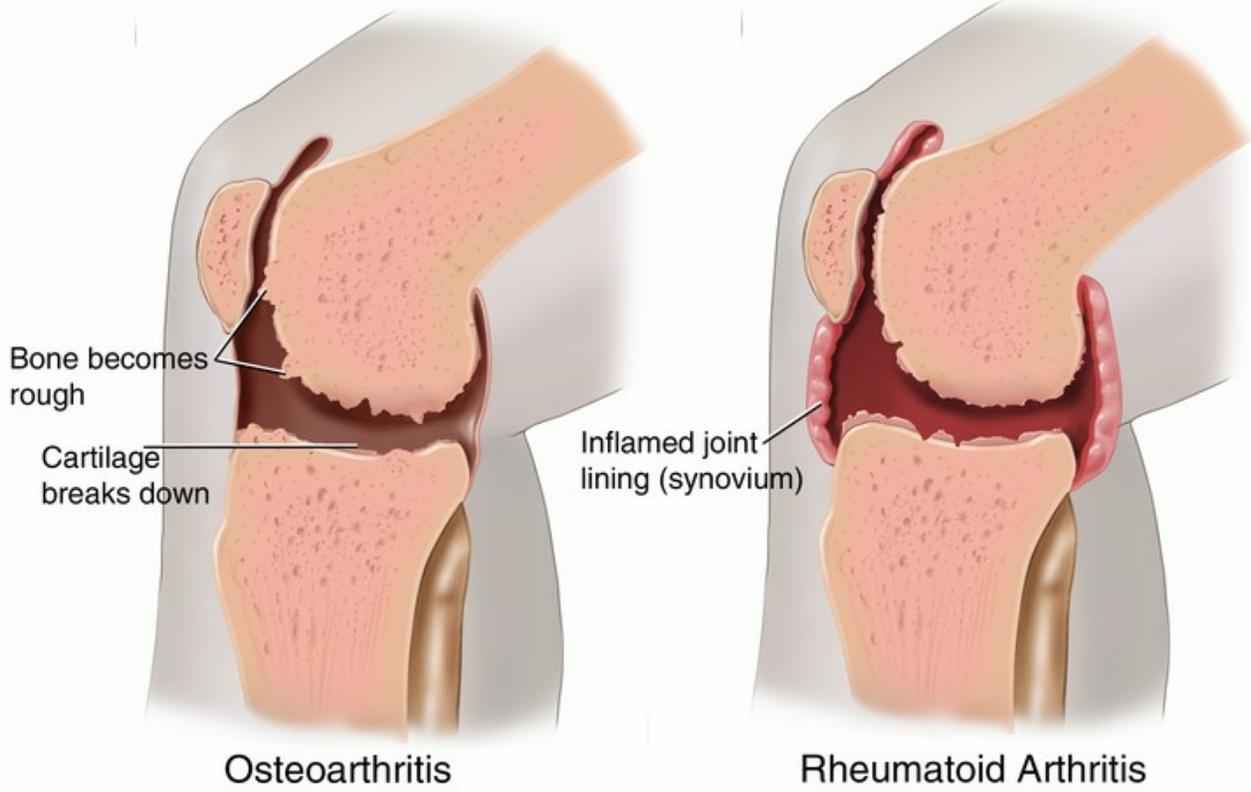
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# Arthritis



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