

Arthritis Solutions

Are your joints stiff and inflamed – painful, even? If so, you may have osteoarthritis, the most common form of arthritis. If your knees or hips are affected, you may be having trouble walking and doing everyday activities. Luckily, there are several treatment options to discuss with your doctor. You have a choice about which one to try.

Treatments Aplenty

The main treatment choices for knee or hip osteoarthritis are:

Lifestyle changes: Avoiding activities that cause discomfort, losing weight, using a properly fitted cane, participating in an osteoarthritis education program, and exercising regularly can help with osteoarthritis pain. Weight loss – if you are overweight – is particularly important, because excess weight can strain already diseased joints. Exercise, meanwhile, strengthens the muscles surrounding the joints, so they can carry some of the load. People with knee osteoarthritis may also benefit from shoe inserts (orthotics) or braces.

Medications: Over-the-counter pain medications, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol®) and medications called non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) can relieve osteoarthritis pain. NSAIDs include ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®) and naproxen sodium (Aleve®). If over-the-counter products aren't effective, prescription-strength NSAIDs are also available.

Complementary therapy: Some people find that acupuncture and massage help relieve osteoarthritis pain. Others report pain relief after taking glucosamine and chondroitin sulfate supplements. However, the data demonstrating these benefits are not very strong.

Surgery: Many people with osteoarthritis are able to live well using a combination of non-surgical treatments to manage their pain and stiffness. Some, however, find that their arthritis is too disabling and/or painful, and they can't do the things they want to do. At this point, a person might start talking with his or her doctor about surgery. Total knee and total hip replacement surgery are the most common surgeries used to treat osteoarthritis.

People with knee osteoarthritis have an additional treatment option that is not available to people with hip osteoarthritis: **hyaluronic acid or corticosteroids injections**. Hyaluronic acid makes joint movement more comfortable by making the fluid in the joint more slippery. Corticosteroid injections reduce swelling and temporarily relieve pain.

A Health Coach Can Help

The treatments described above are often combined. Your options will depend on the severity of your condition, your overall health, how much your symptoms disturb your life, and the treatment you've already had. A Health Coach can help you work with your doctor to understand your specific circumstances and find the treatment that is best for you.

Health Coaches are specially trained healthcare professionals, such as nurses, dietitians, and respiratory therapists. They are available by phone, anytime, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, at no charge to you. If appropriate, a Health Coach will send you a complimentary video, such as *Treatment Choices for Hip Osteoarthritis* or *Treatment Choices for Knee Osteoarthritis*.

To talk to a Health Coach, call (800) 658-2750. You can also get information online at www.thedialogcenter.com/bcbsnd.