

[Share](#)[Twitter](#)[Facebook](#)[E-newsletters](#)Find Health Topic: [A](#) [B](#) [C](#) [D](#) [E](#) [F](#) [G](#) [H](#) [I](#) [J](#) [K](#) [L](#) [M](#) [N](#) [O](#) [P](#) [Q](#) [R](#) [S](#)Font Size  [T](#) [U](#) [V](#) [W](#) [X](#) [Y](#) [Z](#)Reviewed
March 2010**Do I Have
Arthritis?****What Is
Arthritis?**

Many people start to feel pain and stiffness in their bodies over time. Sometimes their hands

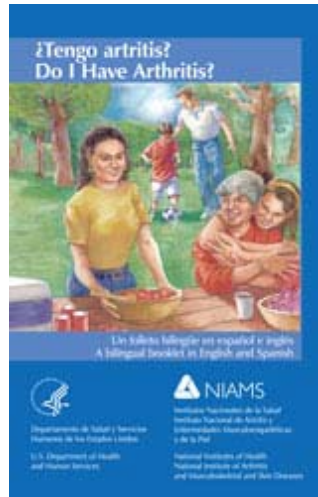
or knees or shoulders get sore and are hard to move and may become swollen. These people may have arthritis (ar-THRY-tis). Arthritis may be caused by inflammation (in-flah-MAY-shun), of the tissue lining the joints. Some signs of inflammation include redness, heat, pain, and swelling. These problems are telling you that something is wrong.

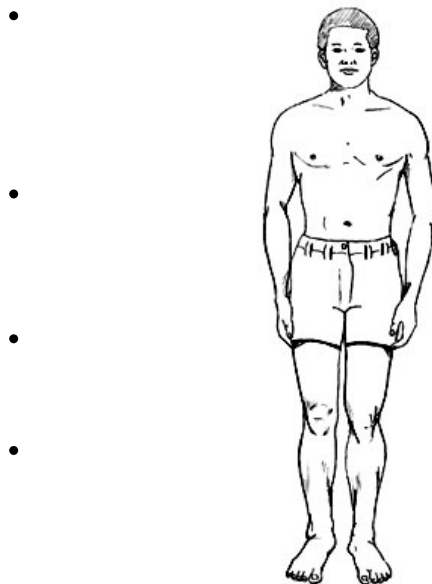
Joints are places where two bones meet, such as your elbow or knee. Over time, in some types of arthritis but not in all, the joints involved can become severely damaged.

There are different types of arthritis. In some diseases in which arthritis occurs, other organs, such as your eyes, your chest, or your skin, can also be affected. Some people may worry that arthritis means they won't be able to work or take care of their children and their family. Others think that you just have to accept things like arthritis.

It's true that arthritis can be painful. But there are things you can do to feel better. This booklet tells you some facts about arthritis and gives you some ideas about what to do, so you can keep doing many of the things you enjoy.

- [What Are the Types of Arthritis?](#)
- [Do I Have Arthritis?](#)
- [What Can I Do?](#)
- [How Will the Doctor Help?](#)
- [How Should I Use Arthritis Medicine?](#)





Any part of your body can become inflamed or painful from arthritis.

What Are the Types of Arthritis?

There are several types of arthritis. The two most common ones are osteoarthritis (AH-stee-oh-ar-THRY-tis) and rheumatoid (ROO-mah-toyd) arthritis.

Osteoarthritis is the most common form of arthritis. This condition usually comes with age and most often affects the fingers, knees, and hips. Sometimes osteoarthritis follows an injury to a joint. For example, a young person might hurt his knee badly playing soccer. Or someone might fall or be injured in a car accident. Then, years after the individual's knee has apparently healed, he might get arthritis in his knee joint.



A sports injury to a knee when a person is young can lead to arthritis years later.

Rheumatoid arthritis happens when the body's own defense system doesn't work properly. It affects joints and bones (often of the hands and feet), and may also affect internal organs

and systems. You may feel sick or tired, and you may have a fever.

Another common type of arthritis, gout, is caused by crystals that build up in the joints. It usually affects the big toe, but many other joints may be affected.

Arthritis is seen with many other conditions. These include:

- lupus (LOOP-us), in which the body's defense system can harm the joints, the heart, the skin, the kidneys, and other organs
- an infection that gets into a joint and destroys the cushion between the bones.

Do I



Rheumatoid arthritis can make it hard to hold a pencil or a brush.

Have Arthritis?

Pain is the way your body tells you that something is wrong. Most types of arthritis cause pain in your joints. You might have trouble moving around. Some kinds of arthritis can affect different parts of your body. So, along with pain in your joints, you may:

- have a fever
- lose weight
- have trouble breathing
- get a rash or itch.

These symptoms may also be signs of other illnesses.

What Can I Do?

Go see a doctor. Many people use herbs or medicines that you can buy without a prescription for pain. You should tell your doctor if you do. Only a doctor can tell if you have arthritis or a related condition and what to do about it. It's important not to wait.

You'll need to tell the doctor how you feel and

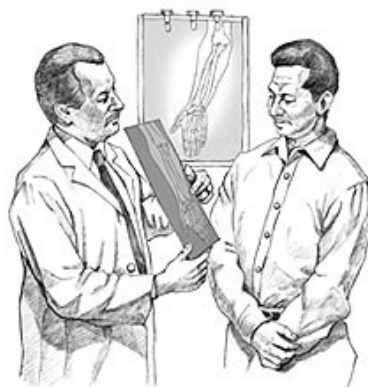
where
you
hurt.
The
doctor
will



Having stiffness or pain when you move could
be a sign of arthritis.

examine you and may take x rays (pictures) of
your bones or joints. The x rays don't hurt and
aren't dangerous. You may also have to give a
little blood for tests that will help the doctor
decide what kind of arthritis you may have.

**How
Will
the**



The x rays will tell the doctor what is happening
to the bones and joints inside your body.

Doctor Help?

After the doctor knows what kind of arthritis
you have, he or she will talk with you about the
best way to treat it. The doctor may give you a
prescription for medicine that will help with the
pain, stiffness, and inflammation. Health
insurance or public assistance may help you
pay for the medicine, doctor visits, tests, and x
rays.

How Should I Use Arthritis Medicine?

Before you leave the doctor's office, make sure
you ask about the best way to take the
medicine the doctor prescribes. For example,
you may need to take some medicines with

milk,
or you
may
need
to eat



To get your medicine, take your prescription to your local drugstore or send it to your mail-order provider.

something just before or after taking them, to make sure they don't upset your stomach.

You should also ask how often to take the medicine or to put cream on the spots that bother you. Creams might make your skin and joints feel better. Sometimes, though, they can make your skin burn or break out in a rash. If this happens, call the doctor.



You may need to drink milk or eat when you take your medicine.

What If I Still Hurt?

Sometimes you might still have pain after using your medicine. Here are some things to try.

- Take a warm shower.
- Do some gentle stretching exercises.
- Use an ice pack on the sore area.
- Rest the sore joint.

If you still hurt after using your medicine correctly and doing one or more of these

things, call your doctor. Another kind of medicine might work better for you. Some people can also benefit from surgery, such as joint replacement.

You Can Feel



Using an ice pack on a sore joint can help relieve pain.

Better!



Keeping active may help reduce the stiffness in your joints.

Arthritis can damage your joints, internal organs, and skin. There are things you can do to keep the damage from getting worse. They might also make you feel better:

- Try to keep your weight down. Too much weight can make your knees and hips hurt.
- Exercise. Moving all of your joints will help you. The doctor or nurse can show you how to move more easily. Going for a walk every day will help, too.
- Take your medicines when and how you are supposed to. They can help reduce pain and stiffness.
- Try taking a warm shower in the morning.
- See your doctor regularly.
- Seek information that can help you.

For More Help

For more information on arthritis and related conditions contact any of the following organizations:

**National Institute of Arthritis and
Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases
(NIAMS)
Information Clearinghouse
National Institutes of Health**

1 AMS Circle
Bethesda, MD 20892-0001
Phone: 301-495-4484
Toll Free: 877-22-NIAMS (877-226-4267)
TTY: 301-565-2966
Fax: 301-718-6366
Email: NIAMSinfo@mail.nih.gov
Website: <http://www.niams.nih.gov>

Arthritis Foundation (AF)

P.O. Box 7669
Atlanta, GA 30357
Phone: 404-872-7100
Toll Free: 800-283-7800
Website: <http://www.arthritis.org>

**American Academy of Orthopaedic
Surgeons (AAOS)**

6300 North River Road
Rosemont, IL 60018
Phone: 847-823-7186
Fax: 847-823-8125
Website: <http://www.aaos.org>

American College of Rheumatology

2200 Lake Boulevard NE
Atlanta, GA 30319
Phone: 404-633-3777
Fax: 404-633-1870
Website: <http://www.rheumatology.org>

Acknowledgments

NIAMS thanks the following people and organizations for their contribution to this project:

John Klippel, M.D., Arthritis Foundation;
Graciela S. Alarcón, M.D., M.P.H., University of Alabama at Birmingham; Virginia González, M.P.H., Stanford Patient Education Center, Stanford University School of Medicine, Palo Alto, CA; Carlos Lavernia, M.D., Miami, FL; the Arthritis Foundation; the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons; and the American College of Rheumatology.

Special thanks go to the patients with arthritis who reviewed this publication and provided valuable input.

Do You Have Arthritis or a

Related Condition?

You may be able to help scientists learn more about these conditions.

For information about research projects near your home, call

**National Institute of Arthritis
and Musculoskeletal and Skin
Diseases (NIAMS)
Information Clearinghouse
National Institutes of Health**

1 AMS Circle
Bethesda, MD 20892-0001
Phone: 301-495-4484
Toll Free: 877-22-NIAMS
(877-226-4267)
TTY: 301-565-2966
Fax: 301-718-6366
Email: NIAMSinfo@mail.nih.gov
Website: <http://www.niams.nih.gov>

You could make a difference!

The mission of the National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases (NIAMS), a part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' National Institutes of Health (NIH), is to support research into the causes, treatment, and prevention of arthritis and musculoskeletal and skin diseases; the training of basic and clinical scientists to carry out this research; and the dissemination of information on research progress in these diseases. The National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases Information Clearinghouse is a public service sponsored by NIAMS that provides health information and information sources. Additional information can be found on the NIAMS Web site at www.niams.nih.gov.

For Your Information

This publication contains information about medications used to treat the health condition discussed here. When this publication was developed, we included the most up-to-date (accurate) information available. Occasionally, new information on medication is released.

For updates and for any questions about any medications you are taking, please contact

U.S. Food and Drug Administration

Toll Free: 888-INFO-FDA

(888-463-6332)

Website: <http://www.fda.gov>

For additional information on specific medications, visit Drugs@FDA at www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cder/drugsatfda. Drugs@FDA is a searchable catalog of FDA-approved drug products.

This publication is not copyrighted. Readers are encouraged to duplicate and distribute as many copies as needed.

Additional copies of this publication are available from:

**National Institute of Arthritis and
Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases
(NIAMS)
Information Clearinghouse
National Institutes of Health**

1 AMS Circle
Bethesda, MD 20892-0001
Phone: 301-495-4484
Toll Free: 877-22-NIAMS
(877-226-4267)
TTY: 301-565-2966
Fax: 301-718-6366
Email: NIAMSinfo@mail.nih.gov
Website: <http://www.niams.nih.gov>

NIH Publication No. 10-4665

Many of our publications are available in print. Would you like to order publications on arthritis to be mailed to you? [Visit our online order form.](#)