

Title: Osteoarthritis/DJD. What can you do?

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Date: 11/02/2008

Key words: Osteoarthritis, degenerative joint disease, patient information, treatment

Abstract: Osteoarthritis or Degenerative Joint Disease is a common problem affecting many people. Although there is no cure, many treatment options are available to help treat the pain and disability associated with this condition. These include exercise, weight loss, topical and oral pain medications, joint injections and surgery. Glucosamine sulfate is an over-the-counter remedy that scientific research has conflicting conclusions regarding. Presently, it is unclear whether or not glucosamine sulfate can help the symptoms of osteoarthritis.

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Osteoarthritis/DJD

What can you do?



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What is Osteoarthritis/DJD?

Osteoarthritis, also called Degenerative Joint Disease (DJD), is a common, progressive, noninflammatory disease that often affects the bony spine, hips, knees and hands.

As we age, cumulative stresses as well as other factors cause wear and tear on our joints. The cartilage and bone of our joints can be damaged and new bone may be formed. New bone spurs, called osteophytes, can push on nerves causing pain. Mild inflammation may result, although this type of arthritis is generally considered destructive rather than inflammatory.

Progressive changes from osteoarthritis, especially bone spurs and other bone remodeling, can change the shape of joints, deforming them over time. This can make walking and other activities painful and difficult.

Although exactly what causes osteoarthritis is unknown, being over age 50, obese, injuring a joint, or years of physical stress from a job or sports can make it more likely for you to develop osteoarthritis.

What can you do?

Although there is no cure for osteoarthritis, you do have options for treating the pain and other effects of this disease.

Exercise

Weight bearing exercise at an intensity that does not cause pain for more than two hours can increase strength and decrease pain associated with osteoarthritis. Exercises that strengthen the muscles surrounding a joint are especially effective.

Weight loss

Losing weight can help relieve the strain put on joints, which can help with pain control. Losing weight can even help delay or prevent the need for surgery!

Pain medication

Acetaminophen is a common drug treatment for arthritis pain. It can be used several times a day in doses up to 4000 mg daily, but care must be taken to avoid permanent damage to your liver. Talk to your doctor. Many other drugs are available for controlling the pain from arthritis, including topical creams.

What if that doesn't work?

If your arthritis symptoms are still affecting your life, you have other choices, including injections directly into the joint. Two commonly injected substances are steroids and hyaluronic acid. Some patients with severe osteoarthritis may benefit from surgery, including artificial joint replacement. Your doctor can help decide if this may be right for you.

What about glucosamine and chondroitin?

Many formulations of "natural" substances such as glucosamine and chondroitin sulfate have been used to try and stop the pain and joint destruction associated with osteoarthritis, and are available without a prescription. Most scientific research involving these treatments has involved the knee joints, and the results are inconclusive. This means that some scientific studies appear to show a benefit, while others do not. However, they have not been shown to cause harm, and may be effective. Talk to your doctor if you are considering glucosamine or chondroitin.

