



KAISER PERMANENTE®

Arthritis

Arthritis refers to a variety of joint problems that cause pain, stiffness, and swelling of a joint. Arthritis affects people of all ages, but it affects older people the most.

Although there are many different types of arthritis, the three most common forms are osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, and gout.

Let's look at these one at a time.

Osteoarthritis, or degenerative joint disease, is the most common type of arthritis for both women and men over the age of 45. Its symptoms include pain, stiffness, and swelling, usually in the fingers, hips, and knees.

Rheumatoid Arthritis is usually seen after the age of 30, and affects women more frequently than men. Its symptoms include pain, stiffness, and swelling in multiple joints, commonly in the hands, wrist, feet, knees, and hips.

Gout most often affects men over 40, and may be aggravated by alcohol and organ meats, such as liver, kidneys or pancreas. Its symptoms include sudden onset of burning pain, stiffness, and swelling, typically in the big toe, ankle, knee, wrist, or elbow.

It may not be possible to prevent arthritis, but you can often control the symptoms. For instance, maintaining a healthy weight and not smoking can help control the symptoms of arthritis. It also helps to avoid jarring activities, such as high-impact aerobics. On the other hand, more gentle exercise, such as swimming or walking, can be quite helpful.

Although arthritis tends to be a chronic condition, its symptoms can often be relieved. Remember to rest sore joints by taking short breaks from your regular activities throughout the day. Put each of your joints gently through a full range of motion exercise once or twice a day. If your joint isn't swollen, apply heat to it for 20 to 30 minutes two or three times a day. If it is swollen, apply cold packs for 10 to 15 minutes two or three times a day. Take Tylenol for pain relief. Finally, consider enrolling in an arthritis self-management program.

If you have arthritis or think you may have it, you should be working with your doctor. This is true for all forms of arthritis. If you've already been diagnosed, you and your health care professional should develop a treatment plan together. This may include injections of medication, such as cortisone, which can be effective but must be closely monitored for side-effects. In any case, you should call your health care professional when you have fever or a skin rash along with severe joint pain, or if the pain is so great that you can't use the joint, or if you experience sudden, unexplained swelling in any joint.

And finally, though arthritis is unusual in children, it does occur. Unexplained joint swelling or tenderness in children should be evaluated immediately by a doctor.



For additional health information you can trust:

- Log on to our members-only Web site at www.kaiserpermanente.org/california, then click the "Kaiser Permanente Members Only" button
- Visit your local Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center
- Check your Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook
- Listen to the Kaiser Permanente Healthphone messages at 1-800-33 ASK ME (1-800-332-7563)

To get your free Handbook and Healthphone Directory, call 1-800-464-4000.

The information presented here is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of professional medical care. If you have persistent health problems or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor or other health care professional.

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REGIONAL HEALTH EDUCATION