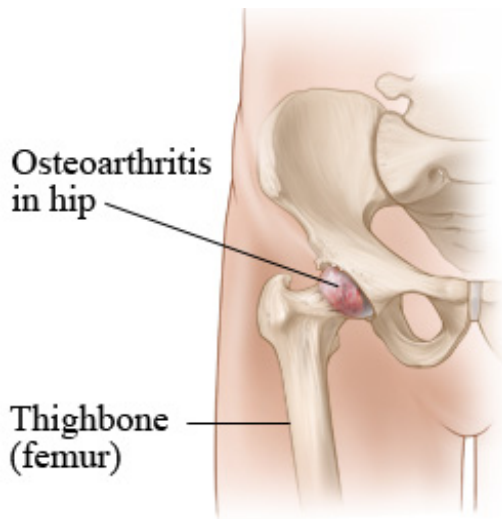


# Osteoarthritis: Care Instructions



## Your Care Instructions

Arthritis is a common health problem in which the joints are inflamed. There are several kinds of arthritis. Osteoarthritis is caused by a breakdown of cartilage, the hard, thick tissue that cushions the joints. It causes pain, stiffness, and swelling, often in the spine, fingers, hips, and knees. Osteoarthritis can happen at any age, but it is most common in older people.

Osteoarthritis never goes away completely, but it can be controlled. Medicine and home treatment can reduce the pain and prevent the arthritis from getting worse.

**Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety.** Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

## How can you care for yourself at home?

- Take a warm shower or bath in the morning to relieve stiffness. Avoid sitting still afterwards.
- If the joint is not swollen, use moist heat, like a warm, damp towel, for 20 to 30 minutes, 2 or 3 times a day. Do not use heat on a swollen joint.
- If the joint is swollen, use ice or cold packs for 10 to 20 minutes, once an hour. Cold will help relieve pain and reduce inflammation. Put a thin cloth between the ice and your skin.
- To prevent stiffness, gently move the joint through its full range of motion several times a day.
- If the joint hurts, avoid activities that put a strain on it for a few days. Take rest breaks throughout the day.
- Get regular exercise. Walking, swimming, yoga, biking, tai chi, and water aerobics are good exercises that are gentle on the joints.
- Reach and stay at a healthy weight. If you need to lose or maintain weight, regular exercise and a healthy diet will help. Extra weight can strain the joints, especially the knees and hips, and make the pain worse. Losing even a few pounds may help.
- Take pain medicines exactly as directed.
  - If the doctor gave you a prescription medicine for pain, take it as prescribed.
  - If you are not taking a prescription pain medicine, ask your doctor if you can take an over-the-counter medicine.

## When should you call for help?

**Call your doctor now** or seek immediate medical care if:

- The pain is so bad that you cannot use the joint.
- You have sudden back pain with weakness in your legs or loss of bowel or bladder control.
- Your stools are black and tarlike or have streaks of blood.
- You have severe pain and swelling in more than one joint.

Watch closely for changes in your health, and be sure to contact your doctor if:

- You have side effects from the medicines, like belly pain, ongoing heartburn, or nausea.
- Joint pain continues for more than 6 weeks, and home treatment is not helping.

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