

Arthritis care week

14th-21th May

I don't think we've ever talked about arthritis have we? Yet it affects approximately 9 million people in the UK.

It is thought to be the single most disabling physical condition in the UK.

It is characterised by painful, often swollen, stiff joints, and can affect people of any age, including children.

Arthritis care is a charity, supporting, and promoting awareness for people suffering with arthritis.

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What actually is it?

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Osteoarthritis

The most common 'wear and tear' or degenerative type. This will no doubt come to all of us as we 'mature' (!) but usually starts in our mid 40s

As a rule, it appears more often in :

-knees

-hips

-spine

-hands

Starting by roughening the smooth cartilage that lines our joints, which in turn makes the joint more painful, and difficult to move, making the ligaments and tendons inflame causing swelling. The cartilage can be eroded, causing bones to rub together which ultimately can distort the joint itself.

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Rheumatoid Arthritis

Less common, and caused by the body's own defence (immune) system attacking our own joints, causing pain and swelling.

It appears more common in women, and again usually presents in 30s-50s age group.

The covering of the joint swells first, and can distort the shape.

Rheumatoid arthritis can also have an impact on other organs and tissues in the body.

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There are several other more unusual types of arthritis, I will include a link at the bottom with more information if you wish to look into them in more detail.

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So what does it feel like?

Symptoms of arthritis

The symptoms you feel will be a bit different depending on which type you are diagnosed with, but as a general rule, common features include:

- joint pain, tenderness and stiffness
- inflammation in and around the joints
- restricted movement of the joints
- warm red skin over the affected joint
- weakness and muscle wasting

It is important to have these symptoms assessed, as some of the management will be different.

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Treatment

Sadly, there is no actual cure for arthritis.

The aims of treatment are to ease symptoms and slow the progression down.

Osteoarthritis treatments include lifestyle changes, eg weight loss, exercise, physiotherapy, medicines to ease pain and inflammation, (including joint injections) and sometimes surgery.

Treatment for rheumatoid arthritis

Is a bit different, and aims to slow the condition's progress and minimise joint inflammation. This helps prevent joint damage. These would be assessed and management initiated by a 'rheumatologist'

Treatments include some quite complicated medicines , and again physiotherapy and surgery are options.

Further information, help and support

<https://www.versusarthritis.org/about-arthritis/conditions/arthritis/>

Versus Arthritis provides help and support for people in the UK with arthritis, plus their families and friends.

They have a free helpline you can call for further information and support on 0800 5200 520

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/arthritis/>