

Osteoarthritis (OA) of the Hip

Osteoarthritis (OA) is the degeneration of the joint cartilage that is associated with the aging process. It is like grey hair and wrinkles within your joint and affects both the ball and socket parts of the hip joint.

The smooth cartilage surfaces become roughened, becoming thin and the bone underneath thickens. There is also inflammation of the surrounding tissues. This can cause the joint to stiffen and the muscles around it can become weaker. The amount of arthritic changes seen on X-ray does not always relate to the level of pain you can have ie sometimes you can have a lot of arthritic change seen on X-ray but very little pain.



Risk Factors

There are a number of risk factors that can contribute to Osteoarthritis.

Age – Osteoarthritis is more common over the age of 40. However it is not solely caused by getting older. It may be due to other factors like **weakening muscles, a decrease in physical activity and slower healing times** from injury as we age.

Gender – Osteoarthritis is more common in women than men.

Weight – Being over-weight may be associated with osteoarthritis for two reasons: the joints are not designed to cope with extra weight, and the extra fatty tissue in the body may cause more general inflammation.

Previous Injury – if you have previously broken a bone as your biomechanics can be affected.

Joint Abnormalities – Some people are more prone to develop OA of the hip due to its shape. For example abnormalities in the hip that you have had since birth.

What Can I Do to Help Myself?

Exercise – Strengthen your muscles. This will help to take the load off of the joint allowing your pain to improve. Low impact exercises like swimming, cycling or walking will help to keep your general fitness and avoid weight gain. Stretching can help with the mobility of the joint. Thai Chi, yoga and Pilates can also be helpful.

Weight Management – Being over-weight increases the load on the joint and is more likely to worsen your symptoms in the long term. Extra fatty tissue increases your inflammation.. It can be more difficult to lose weight when you are in pain so the focus should be on a calorie controlled diet and exercise that your therapist may have given you.. Local weight loss support can be found here (link to 'why weight' or something similar in our website signposting)

Reducing Joint Stress – reducing stress on the affected joint may be helpful in relieving symptoms. Strategies may include for example pacing (link to pacing info) to slowly build up your exercise tolerance or using a walking stick.

Tablets and Creams – taking a pain killer to help you manage your pain can be very helpful, especially if it allows you to do your exercises and continue with daily activities. Your pharmacist can help you with non-prescription medication and creams. For stronger medication you should speak to a pharmacist or GP. Currently there is no strong evidence that supplements are helpful but a good balanced diet, light moderate exercise and avoiding smoking is encouraged.

Be Positive – OA symptoms do not have to get worse. It often stays the same or may get better.

When should I see my Doctor?

If you have pain and stiffness in your hip, without any cause this may simply be a strain rather than OA. Often this will settle within a few weeks. The general advice is to reduce activity for a few days to allow your symptoms to settle, and then slowly increase to your previous level of activity. If your symptoms have not settled within around 6 weeks, and are perhaps getting worse and disturbing your sleep, you can self-refer yourself to see a rehab therapist.

If the rehab does not prove to be effective, you can be referred onto an advanced practitioner who may discuss further options with you that may include a local corticosteroid injection or surgery.