



Joint Deformity with OA

by PATRICIA BRATIANU

Joint Deformity Due to Osteoarthritis: Causes, Symptoms, and Treatment

Joint deformity from osteoarthritis causes pain, disfigurement, and debility. Several factors precipitate the formation of osteoarthritis and joint deformity.

Some signs and symptoms of joint deformity are obvious, while others are subtle. Treatments are available that prevent deformity, reduce symptoms, and may enhance the quality of your life.

How Does a Joint Become Deformed?

Cartilage is a tough, white smooth type of connective tissue which lines and protects your joints. Over time, it becomes yellow, thin, and rough, and may break down.

Loose pieces of cartilage may float in the fluid that cushions your joints. As a result, inflammation occurs and spaces within your joints narrow. Bone tissue begins to grow at the site of damage.

This occurs within the joint; especially at the sites where ligaments and tendons normally attach. The bone surfaces become uneven. Your bones may rub against each other. The bone continues to grow abnormally, resulting in further deformity.

Some people are more likely than others to develop joint deformities? Abnormal cartilage and crystal formation in your joints hasten deformity formation, and chronic inflammation due to other illnesses makes you prone to changes in your joints.

Your job may also predispose you to joint changes. For example, if you have a history of working in a field that required frequent heavy lifting, your joints will suffer.

How Can I Tell If My Joints Are Deformed?

You may experience pain, though the degree of joint damage may not be reflected by the amount of pain you experience. Studies indicate that individuals who have minimal pain may have extensive joint deformities, while severe pain may arise in the presence of slight joint damage.

Consult with your health care provider and utilize diagnostic studies as ordered by your physician so that the degree of joint damage and deformity may be identified. You may have severe internal joint deformities without the damage being visible externally.

X-rays are the primary diagnostic tools which are used to evaluate joint health. Blood tests may be used to rule out causes other than osteoarthritis. Occasionally, a sample of the fluid from a joint is obtained. This is also used to rule out other causes of joint deformity.

Next page: general signs of joint deformity.

General Signs of Joint Deformity

Joints most likely to become deformed include those in the fingers, hands, hips, knees, toes, lower back, and neck. Here are some common signs of joint deformity.

- You may or may not experience pain in the affected joint. If you do have pain, it is likely to diminish if you rest the affected area. Pain may result from stretching and swelling of the tissues surrounding your joint as cartilage within the joint does not contain nerve endings.
- If you have widespread joint deformities, your posture, coordination, and mobility may be impaired.
- Your symptoms may be worse in humid environments. The old tales that people tell about being able to predict when a storm is coming by their joint pains are true. Your joints may be painful in the presence of wet weather.
- You may feel or hear grating when you move affected joints.
- If joint damage is advanced, you may see the deformity. Your joint may become partially dislocated and the bone may thicken and be irregularly shaped.

Red, Painful, Swollen Lumps on Fingers

Check with your health care provider for a diagnosis if you have red, swollen lumps on your fingers, but they are likely to be nodules. Nodules commonly develop in the joints which are closest to the tips of fingers. Some nodules affect the finger joints are closest to the hand; but they are less common.

Typical symptoms of both types of nodules include achiness, redness, swelling, and tenderness. Women are more likely than men to develop them. They tend to run in families. Nodules are made out of bone.

While they may not decrease your ability to use your fingers, they are unattractive. It is common for nodules to occur in several fingers. Unfortunately, they do not seem to be preventable. Treatments are aimed at promoting comfort.

Changes in Hips

Osteoarthritis of the hip and its resulting deformities results in a serious condition that may require joint replacement. It may occur due to congenital malformation or obesity. One or both hips may be affected.

Men are more likely to suffer from deformities of the hips than women are. You may or may not experience pain in your hip. Pain may arise in your knee, inside of your thigh, or groin.

As the deformity worsens, the pain and changes with the hip joint may become disabling. Pain may increase with movement. Rising from a chair may be particularly difficult. Over time the mobility of the joint may become very limited.

Next page: treating joint deformities.

Changes in the Knees

You may hear a cracking or grating sound when you walk or bend your knee. It may be difficult to bend your knee. Pain may be present. If you are an overweight female, you have a higher risk than other people for developing knee deformities due to osteoarthritis. Another type of knee deformity may occur in young people. This usually affects the knee cap.

OA of the Spine

Deformities of the vertebrae may produce local and generalized symptoms. Localized pain and stiffness are the most common symptoms. The discs, which provide a cushion between each vertebra, may thin, dry out, and erode.

If this occurs, you may experience muscle or nerve pain which may radiate to other parts of your body. Bone spurs may grow and cause deformity and pain.

Your vertebrae form a protective column which surrounds your spinal cord. Deformities may narrow the passageway for the spinal cord to travel through. As a result, nerve and blood vessel damage may arise. You may develop dizziness, have trouble walking, experience balance problems, or arthritis headaches. The bones in your spine may fuse together, limiting your range of motion.

Osteoarthritis of the spine may become very debilitating, painful, and severely decrease your quality of life.

Treatment of Joint Deformities

Treatments are geared toward maintaining joint health, reducing pain, and enhancing quality of life. It is usually necessary to use several treatment modalities when preventing or treating deformed joints. Here are some of the most common options.

- Medications are used to reduce inflammation and pain. Oral and topical medications are beneficial. Injections into affected joints may provide pain relief and relieve inflammation. . Hormonal therapies may be beneficial.
- Surgery may be needed if joints become extensively deformed.
- A balanced regimen of rest and gentle exercises may be helpful for relieving discomfort and maintaining joint mobility.
- Application of warm or hot packs may feel good.
- Assistive devices such as splints, or walkers may increase independence and improve comfort levels.
- Stress management techniques can help you to cope with the challenges of living with a chronic condition.
- Surgical techniques are becoming more refined and effective.
- Herbal, vitamin, mineral, and other supplements can provide your body with the nutrients needed to maintain joint health.
- Weight management can be very helpful.
- Eat a diet which reduces inflammation.
- Physical therapy, acupuncture, and acupressure may relieve discomfort.

To minimize pain and debility caused by deformed joints, seek treatment early. Care for your joints throughout your life.