Is There a Connection Between Osteoarthritis and Psoriatic Arthritis?

by KARLA JARVIS

Osteoarthritis vs. Psoriatic Arthritis

Osteoarthritis is a common condition and one that I have myself. When it comes to osteoarthritis vs. psoriatic arthritis, symptoms can be similar and there are also many differences between the two diseases. One of the critical differences between osteoarthritis and psoriatic arthritis is that the latter is a chronic, autoimmune disease that also causes joint pain. On the other hand, osteoarthritis is joint pain caused by the wearing away of joint cartilage over time.

As it is an autoimmune disease, psoriatic arthritis is the body's mistaken attack on its healthy skin, nails, and joint cells. There is some indication that our genes may be involved in developing psoriatic arthritis, or it may be due to trauma, or a virus found in the environment. Unfortunately, there is no cure for either of these diseases.

How Do the Signs and Symptoms Differ?

Typically, both of these painful diseases can have periods of remission, alternating with flare-ups, which may last for days or even months. With psoriatic arthritis, you may first notice symptoms of psoriasis, and then you may later learn that you also have psoriatic arthritis. In some people, joint pain becomes an issue before the red, itchy, and scaly patches of psoriasis become evident.

Many with psoriatic arthritis experience joint pain, stiffness, and swelling and may also experience pain in any body area. The pain associated with psoriatic arthritis can range from mild to severe. Other symptoms include the cracking, pitting, and lifting of nails and the inflammation and swelling of tendons and ligaments. Fatigue is another challenging symptom that may impact daily life.

Osteoarthritis also causes joint pain and stiffness and a reduction in the joint's ability to have a complete range of motion. In addition, this disease may slow your activity because of stiff, swollen joints, typically affecting the hips, hands, knees, and spine. For most with the disease, the symptoms can worsen during and following physical activity and often ease with rest.

How Are These Two Diseases Diagnosed?

At this time, science has not yet found one test that can definitively diagnose psoriatic arthritis. However, your doctor can examine particular areas of your body to determine what medical condition you may have, including psoriatic arthritis. For example, joints will be inspected for swelling and tenderness, and fingernails will be evaluated for a yellowish red color and any crumbling or grooved texture. These signs may lead your doctor to a diagnosis of psoriatic arthritis. While psoriatic arthritis can strike at any age, it is more common in those aged 30 to 50. Psoriatic arthritis does run in families, and while the symptoms may arise in childhood, the disease more commonly becomes troublesome in adulthood. Affecting both men and women, the condition is also more common in Caucasians than in other races.

Other medical tests, such as blood work, can eliminate other diseases with similar symptoms, such as rheumatoid arthritis and gout. For example, your doctor may suggest an x-ray, which reveals signs seen in psoriatic arthritis. Magnetic resonance imaging, or an MRI, can also reveal issues in some of the body's soft tissues, leading to a diagnosis of psoriatic arthritis.

Similarly, osteoarthritis is diagnosed based on your physical history and the findings of a physical exam. For example, you may be experiencing joint pain and a loss of function. During a physical exam, your doctor will examine your joints for any swelling, reduction in the range of motion, and any bumps or enlarged areas.

Treating Osteoarthritis

Sadly, there is not yet a cure for osteoarthritis, and the disease cannot be stopped. However, treating the symptoms as they arise may offer you some relief by easing the pain and preventing disability. Most of the treatments provided for osteoarthritis aim to alleviate pain, increase joint function and mobility, and keep you as active as possible.

Several medications, including prescription drugs, over-the-counter drugs, and topical creams, can ease symptoms. In addition, a healthy lifestyle will keep your body composition at its best, which will help relieve your symptoms. Other healthy lifestyle choices that will help you with your osteoarthritis include regular exercise, a nutritious diet, physical and occupational therapies, and nutritional supplements.

If your osteoarthritis is severe and life-limiting, your health care team might recommend joint braces or orthotics. In some cases, surgery might be the best way to relieve your osteoarthritis symptoms; surgery can be minimally invasive to improve the joint's function, while other surgeries can be more complex.

Treating Psoriatic Arthritis

Unfortunately, if you already have psoriasis, you may be at risk of psoriatic arthritis. You and your health care team will develop a treatment plan that will work best for you. Relief is also possible when the disease goes into remission. However, many find that there are triggers that cause their psoriatic arthritis symptoms to flare or worsen. These potential triggers may include skin infection, stress, medications, too much alcohol, and smoking. You may want to keep a journal to determine what your triggers may be. It's also essential to manage your stress and to eat a nutritious and balanced diet.

Treating psoriatic arthritis aims to halt the disease's progression, keep inflammation to a minimum, ease pain, maintain joint mobility, and treat any skin and nail symptoms. Many topical treatments, such as various skin creams, can help relieve the inflammation and itching associated with psoriasis. Another skin treatment is phototherapy. While the side effects of phototherapy may include headaches, fatigue, and nausea, some find that this UVB light treatment can ease symptoms.

The pain from psoriatic arthritis may be relieved by non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, as well as ibuprofen and naproxen. In addition, oral and injected corticosteroids are sometimes used to reduce inflammation. However, they are used at low doses and for brief periods because of the side effects, including bruising, weakening bones, weight gain, and facial swelling. Another medication known as DMARDs (disease-modifying antirheumatic drugs) is a powerful weapon against psoriatic arthritis and can be taken by mouth or easily injected.

Is There a Relationship Between Osteoarthritis and Psoriatic Arthritis?

The two diseases share many similarities, such as chronic conditions that do not yet have a cure, and some of the treatments may be similar. However, these two forms of arthritis have very different origins and processes. Like many diseases, treating osteoarthritis and psoriatic arthritis successfully is dependent on many factors, including lifestyle. Other factors impacting treatment are how severe the disease is, how much of the body is affected, other health conditions, and other medications being taken to address those other health conditions. You and your doctor will need time, as well as trial and error, on the path to finding your best treatment plan.