



Diagnosing Osteoarthritis

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The Diagnostic Process of Osteoarthritis

Do you suspect that you have osteoarthritis (OA)? If you do, you should see your doctor right away. The physician will need to know your symptoms so that he or she may start the process of diagnosing osteoarthritis. You may want to write down the description of your symptoms. Also, write down the following for the doctor to review:

- When and how the symptoms began
- Description of the symptoms
- Location of pain, stiffness, achiness, and other symptoms
- Medical problems that may be related to the symptoms

The doctor will consider your age, especially if you are over 45 years of age. If the problem with pain in your joint(s) have persisted longer than 3 months and morning stiffness lasts no more than 30 minutes, a diagnosis may be made without an x-ray. If there is doubt, the physician may order an x-ray, MRI, or ultrasound. The latter two are better at showing if synovitis is present, which is indicative of OA. Other alternate diagnoses may need to be ruled out if other symptoms are present.

I Have Been Diagnosed. Now What?

- **Discuss your treatment options with your physician.** Consider everything that can be done for you. This can be non-drug therapies, alternative treatments, steroid injections, or surgery.
- **Commit.** When you are informed of treatment options and decided on what to do, be compliant with it.
- **Be kind to your joints.** Avoid putting undue stress on them. Just like car parts, joints wear out. Wearing a support aid or assistive device when you need it can prevent pain and further damage to your joint(s).
- **Stay active.** Though it is easy to avoid activity, it is better that you keep moving. Commit to 30 minutes of exercise a day to stimulate those natural pain-killers, your endorphins. Strengthening exercises and yoga will keep you limber and your joints lubricated.
- **Eat healthy and incorporate antioxidants, like blueberries, into your diet.** They are great for OA patients.
- **Take time for yourself and practice relaxing with your favorite music or reading a novel.** Go for a spa treatment or massage. Reducing stress in your life helps to reduce pain sensation.
- **Work on your support system.** If you can talk with your closest friends and family members about what you are going through, you will find that their support is invaluable. There are online support groups on Facebook, Twitter, and other forums. They can help get you through some of the bumps in the road.
- **Journaling about your OA.** A diary is a good outlet for your personal struggles. You may also want to track your symptoms and interventions to give to the doctor at your next visit.
- **Balance is the key.** While you are keeping active, don't forget to rest up in between. Never feel guilty about slowing down when you need to.

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- **Find a trustworthy source for staying educated.** There are many websites on the Internet today. Do your research and find a resource that will keep you informed of osteoarthritis in the news. Being proactive in your condition will be invaluable in the long run.