



OSTEOARTHRITIS

Overview

Osteoarthritis is a mechanical wear and tear disease of the joints, where the normal cartilage of the joint breaks down and no longer provides a cushion between the bones of the joint. It most affects middle aged to older individuals. While some people do not even know they have osteoarthritis, in others it leads to functional disability and pain.

Commonly involved joints include the back, hips, knees and fingers.

We do not have medications which can reverse the osteoarthritis process. Symptom control remains the key objective.

Exercise, muscle strengthening, diet and weight control are all important to control osteoarthritis. Braces for the knee or hand, and walking aids can also be useful. In some instances, these simple steps is all that is required to reduce pain and maintain joint function.

Acetaminophen (Tylenol) is the first choice for pain relief. When used properly, it is an effective and safe option for most patients with osteoarthritis. Follow the directions provided closely and discuss its optimum use with your doctor.

Anti-inflammatories, or NSAIDs, can also be used for pain relief and can be safely used with acetaminophen. However, NSAIDs are not a good option for patients with heartburn, a stomach ulcer, a heart condition or kidney problems.

Glucosamine is a natural product which has been studied to relieve pain and slow the progression in osteoarthritis. While its effects remain unclear when studied, some patients find it effective. It can take 2-3 months to work.

Joint injections, either with corticosteroids or hyaluronic acid, are also effective and safe options.

If none of these options are effective, often in combination, and you have uncontrolled pain or you are unable to go about your day to day activities as you would like, you may need to discuss further pain control options, or joint replacement surgery, with your doctor.