



ARTHRITIS

EARLY DIAGNOSIS

LESS DAMAGE, LESS PAIN!



PARE Manifesto is committed to raising public awareness of the scale and impact of arthritis/rheumatism across Europe.



ARTHRITIS

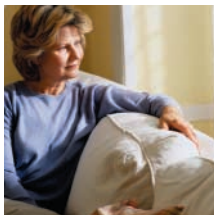
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“I couldn’t believe it when the doctor told me I had rheumatoid arthritis. I was only 14 years old. Fortunately he caught it at an early stage and the tablets I’ve been taking have actually changed the outcome of the disease. I’m lucky he spotted the symptoms when he did.”

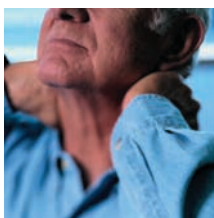
Luis, 24, Lisbon

ARTHRITIS: EARLY DIAGNOSIS – LESS DAMAGE AND LESS PAIN



This leaflet is designed to help you understand more about osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis so that you are able to recognise the symptoms as early as possible and find a therapy that is right for you.

WHAT IS ARTHRITIS AND WHOM DOES IT AFFECT?



Arthritis can affect people of any age. It is most common in people over 55 years old although some types of arthritis can also affect children.

There are over **200 types** of arthritis-related conditions.

The most common of these are osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis.

Osteoarthritis is a joint disease that develops because of wear and tear in the joints. It occurs when the slippery, soft tissue, known as cartilage, which covers the ends of the bones in a joint, breaks down. Healthy cartilage allows bones to glide over one another and absorbs the stress put on a joint, protecting them from damage. Osteoarthritis occurs when this layer wears down and the bones rub together causing pain and swelling and may lead to loss of movement.

Rheumatoid arthritis is the result of a fault in the immune system that causes white blood cells, which normally protect the body, to suddenly attack healthy tissues especially the lining of the joints. The affected joint can lose its shape and alignment, resulting in pain and loss of movement. Unlike other forms of arthritis, the effects of rheumatoid arthritis are not limited to the joints. Other problems such as pain, stiffness, warmth, redness and swelling may arise throughout the body.

Other types of arthritis include:

- **Ankylosing spondylitis** - inflammation in the joints of the backbone which causes the bones of the spine to grow together
- **Juvenile arthritis** - a general term for all types of arthritis that affect children
- **Gout** - a rheumatic disease caused by a defect in the body's chemistry which occurs most frequently in small joints, especially the big toe

If you would like to know more about these conditions and their specific symptoms, ask your doctor for more information.

AM I AT RISK OF ARTHRITIS?

The five main factors which increase the risk of arthritis are:

- **Family history** – if someone in your family has arthritis, you are more likely to develop the condition
- **Obesity** – being overweight puts more pressure on your joints
- **Age** – arthritis is more common in older people
- **Joint trauma** – a previous injury can lead to arthritis later in life
- **Gender** – women are more prone to arthritis and often experience worse symptoms



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“The people I have met through my local arthritis patient group are a great support to me. It has really helped me to talk to others who understand some of the difficulties of living with arthritis and to learn from their experiences.”

Hans, 55, Bonn

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

Symptoms of arthritis can develop suddenly or slowly. The most common symptoms include:

Osteoarthritis

Pain is generalised to start with, and then becomes more localised

Pain often occurs in a joint on one side of the body, but not the other

The main joints involved are weight-bearing (most common in knee, hip, and spine), also certain finger joints

Joint stiffness worsens throughout the day, and lasts no longer than 30 minutes in the morning

Joints are tender but not warm

Rheumatoid arthritis

Pain in specific joints

The same joint on both sides of the body is affected

More likely to affect smaller joints (hands, wrists, toes), and also knees

Joint stiffness normally experienced in the morning for 30 minutes or more

Joint warmth and redness

Small bumps on skin near affected joints

Feeling tired or run down



DO YOU RECOGNISE ANY OF THESE SYMPTOMS?



You are not alone. Perhaps you don't want to complain about your aches and pains, but you don't have to suffer in silence. These symptoms could be early signs of arthritis, which could go on to become more serious.

Many people recognise the symptoms but do not seek help from a healthcare professional and instead manage pain with medicines bought from a pharmacy. If the pain is persistent you should seek advice from your doctor.

HOW COULD ARTHRITIS AFFECT ME?



Most people with arthritis are able to carry on a normal life. In the early stages you may experience pain and perhaps some stiffness or swelling in your joints. Rheumatoid arthritis in particular can leave you feeling extremely tired. For some people arthritis symptoms peak after a number of years and then stay the same or even get easier.

However, others may find that the pain and loss of mobility brought on by arthritis begins to have an impact on many aspects of their life. In its later stages, arthritis could:

- Make certain hobbies such as gardening or cooking more difficult
- Lead to a less independent lifestyle
- Cause strained relationships with friends and family
- Have an impact on your job

People with very severe arthritis may become disabled.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I THINK I MAY HAVE ARTHRITIS?

The first step is to get an accurate diagnosis of your condition.

Early, accurate diagnosis is important. Make an appointment with your doctor to discuss any symptoms.

Remember:

- If you have pain, stiffness or swelling in or around a joint for more than two weeks you should make an appointment to see your doctor
- The earlier an accurate diagnosis is made and steps are taken to control arthritis, the better. Early treatment can mean less joint damage and less pain
- If you are diagnosed with arthritis you should ask which specific type of arthritis you have. The type of arthritis will affect the choice of treatment. The right treatment requires getting the right diagnosis

HOW WILL MY DOCTOR DIAGNOSE ARTHRITIS?



Arthritis is usually diagnosed from the symptoms you discuss with your doctor.

The doctor may also physically examine your joints and x-ray affected areas. X-rays can show changes in the space between the bones and any changes in their shape. In addition, blood tests are usually taken to help diagnose rheumatoid arthritis. If you have experienced pain or swelling in two or more joints for more than six weeks your doctor may refer you to a rheumatologist.

HOW WILL I BE TREATED FOR ARTHRITIS?

There are many different ways to treat arthritis.



Your doctor may recommend changes that simply relate to your lifestyle, these could include a healthy diet and regular careful exercise. Your doctor may suggest you try physiotherapy or use hot or cold packs on affected areas. Some people also find that complementary therapies such as acupuncture, massage or herbal remedies can help control the symptoms. Talk to your doctor about the approach that is best for you.

Patient support groups can also provide you with further information and offer you the opportunity to meet with other people who have arthritis who can share their experiences with you.

If the pain persists, your doctor may advise you to take medication. There are many medicines available, which have been specifically developed to treat the symptoms of arthritis, some are available from your pharmacy whilst others are by prescription only. Your doctor will recommend which is most suitable for you. If you have rheumatoid arthritis, your doctor will often recommend you start medication straight away as early treatment can alter the progression of the disease.

Some widely used medicines include:

NSAIDs (nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs)

This group of medicines includes aspirin, ibuprofen and naproxen. Although effective in reducing inflammation and relieving pain, NSAIDs have been associated with some adverse effects, including indigestion, and may lead to problems in the stomach and gut for some people.

COX-2s (cyclooxygenase-2 selective inhibitors)

These are a newer type of pain medication, which also reduce inflammation. They were developed to reduce complications in the stomach and gut and are more suitable for certain individuals. Your doctor will advise you if these are more appropriate for you.

DMARDs (disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drugs)

For people with rheumatoid arthritis DMARDs are frequently prescribed as early as possible, because they both control symptoms of the disease and can slow its progression.

Biologics

This is the newest category of therapies to treat rheumatoid arthritis. Biologics ease and reduce joint swelling. Although acute side effects have been well assessed, little is known about the long-term effects.

Other types of medication

Other painkillers including codeine-like drugs, such as coproxamol, are frequently used to treat the pain associated with arthritis. Severe pain is sometimes treated with opium-derived medicines and steroids are also occasionally prescribed to reduce inflammation and relieve pain.

Remember:

An early diagnosis could mean less damage and less pain

An early diagnosis of arthritis and targeted treatment gives you the best opportunity to manage your disease.

The right treatment and lifestyle can decrease pain, protect joints and delay the onset of more serious disability so that you can continue living life the way you want to. In some cases early diagnosis can even alter the progression of the disease.

**YOU'LL WONDER WHY YOU DIDN'T
DO SOMETHING SOONER – ACT NOW!**



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“My daughter persuaded me to see my doctor when she noticed the difficulty I had making a cup of tea. I’d got used to feeling like that but she insisted I go and I’m glad I did. My doctor gave me a series of exercises which I now do every morning and have really helped my mobility.”

Faith, 64, London

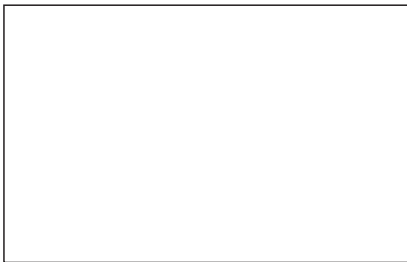
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Further information

Early diagnosis is the theme for World Arthritis Day 2004. For further information please go to: **www.worldarthritisday.org**

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Contact your local PARE Manifesto representative for more details:



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Materials supported by an unrestricted educational grant from Novartis Pharma AG.