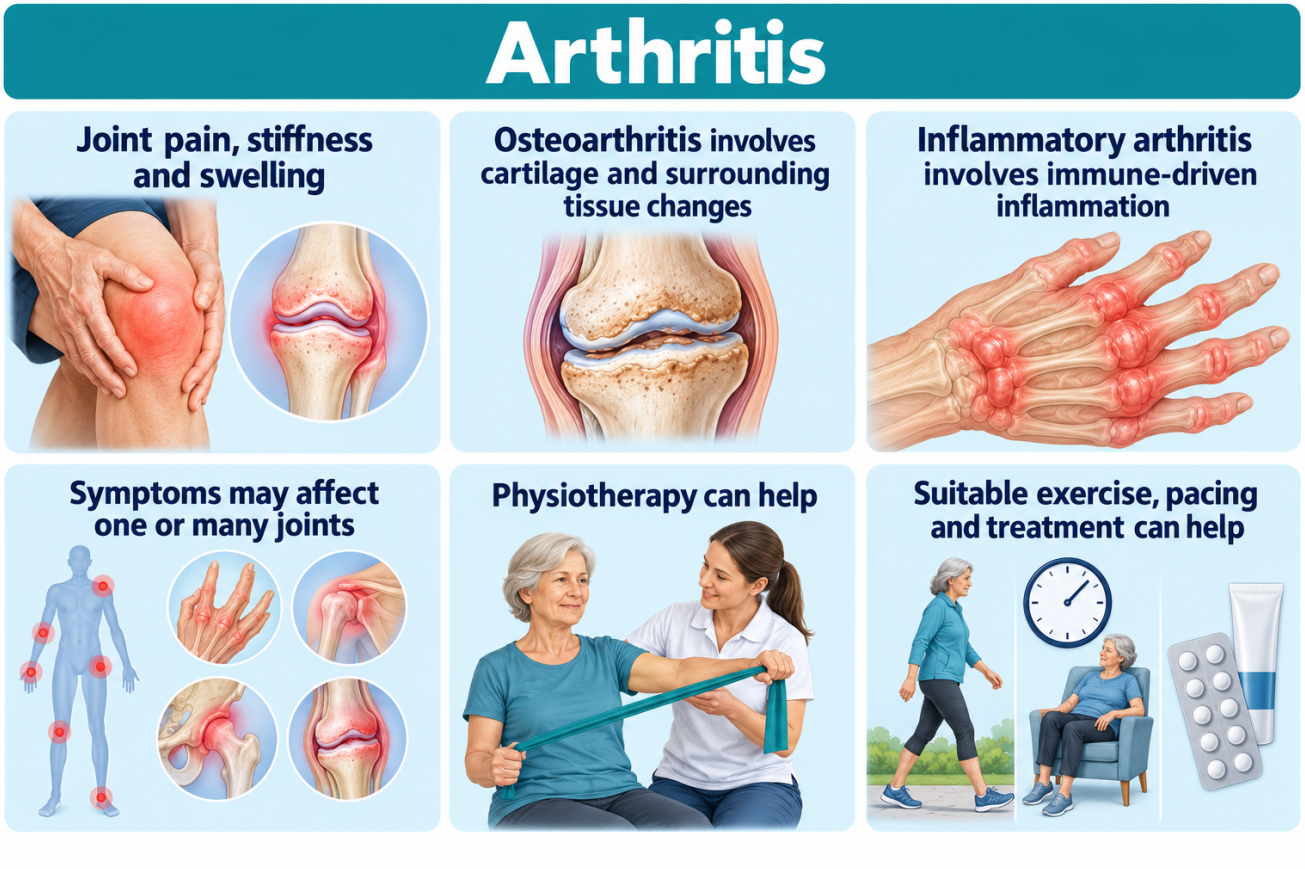
Arthritis

Understanding symptoms, treatment and living well

Arthritis

A guide to treatment, activity and self-management



Understanding arthritis

Arthritis causes joint pain, stiffness and swelling at any age. Osteoarthritis is more common with age, but inflammatory arthritis can also affect young adults and children.

Supporting your wellbeing

Many people lead active, independent lives. Exercise, education and treatment can help control symptoms. There is no single cure, but symptoms can be effectively managed.

Understanding your condition

Symptoms, contributing factors and practical information

Common types of arthritis

Osteoarthritis: the most common type; changes in joint cartilage and surrounding tissues. Often affects knees, hips, hands, spine and feet, with symptoms developing gradually.
Inflammatory arthritis: includes rheumatoid arthritis, psoriatic arthritis and ankylosing spondylitis. Immune-system inflammation can cause swelling, warmth and prolonged stiffness, and may affect other body parts.

Common symptoms

- Joint pain or aching
- Stiffness, often in the morning or after rest
- Swelling or tenderness; reduced movement or flexibility
- Grinding or clicking sensations
- Fatigue, especially with inflammatory arthritis

What causes arthritis?

- Age-related joint changes
- Previous injury or joint stress
- Genetics or autoimmune conditions
- Excess body weight increasing joint load

How is it diagnosed?

Assessment includes symptoms, medical history and physical examination. Blood tests may be used for inflammatory types, with X-ray, ultrasound or MRI if needed.

Key message

Many people lead active, independent lives. Exercise, education and treatment can help control symptoms. There is no single cure, but symptoms can be effectively managed.

Exercise and rehabilitation

Suitable activity under professional guidance

Exercise and activity examples

Regular gentle exercise helps reduce pain and stiffness and improves strength, flexibility and joint support. Ask your physiotherapist which activities are suitable.



Activity guidance

Keep moving: walking, swimming, cycling or suitable exercise classes may help.
Build joint support: a personalised programme can improve strength, flexibility and function.
Pace activity: stay within comfortable limits and avoid overdoing it.

Exercise safely

Break tasks into manageable steps. Use joints wisely, avoid unnecessary strain and seek advice if symptoms affect everyday life.

Management and next steps

Treatment, self-care and when to seek advice

Treatment and physiotherapy

Symptoms can be managed with an individualised exercise programme, improved movement and function, and advice on pacing and joint protection.

Pain management

Use pain relief as advised by your GP. Heat or ice packs may ease symptoms, and relaxation techniques may help.

Lifestyle and self-management

- Maintain a healthy weight and stay active within comfort
- Use supportive footwear or aids if required
- Keep moving; prolonged rest can increase stiffness
- Pace activity, break tasks into steps and protect joints

When should I seek further help?

- Pain or swelling is worsening
- Joints become very swollen, hot or red
- Symptoms affect sleep, work or daily activities
- Unexplained fatigue or weight loss

Outlook and further advice

Many people with arthritis lead active, independent lives with the right exercise, education and treatment. Speak to your GP or physiotherapist for ongoing symptoms or concerns.

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