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## **The Causes, Prevention, and Treatment of Arthritis**

Arthritis, or inflammation of the joints, is Australia's number one crippling disease. It is usually caused by deterioration of the cartilage in the joint.

### **Types of arthritis**

There are over 100 types of arthritis. The two main ones are

- **Osteoarthritis** – this is a degenerative joint disease and is the most common form of arthritis. It occurs when the cartilage loses its elasticity, and when it is stiff it becomes damaged more easily. The cartilage, which acts as a shock absorber, will gradually wear away in some areas. As the cartilage becomes damaged, tendons and ligaments become stretched, causing pain. Eventually the bones may rub against each other causing very severe pain.

It often appears in the weight bearing joints like the knees, hips and spine and in the hands. Cartilage destruction occurs, followed by the formation of large bone spurs on the joints. The first sign of osteoarthritis shows up as morning stiffness, especially in damp weather, then pain from movement that worsens with prolonged activity. Osteoarthritis is usually believed to be due to age or 'wear and tear', however it is more to do with the ability of the body to repair itself. Although osteoarthritis affects more women than men, a man who is 40 kilos overweight doubles his risk of knee and hip arthritis. Food allergies almost always contribute to osteoarthritis symptoms, so a thorough detoxification is a good place to start in the healing process. Today we know that osteoarthritis is repairable- numerous scientific studies have shown that glucosamine sulphate, a natural substance that stimulates the production of cartilage components, works even better than standard drugs.

- **Rheumatoid arthritis** - is an autoimmune problem, where the immune system attacks the lining of the joints, causing pain, inflammation, and often leads to deformed joints. When this connective membrane becomes inflamed, it may

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invade and damage the nearby bone and cartilage, resulting in pain, stiffness, loss of movement and eventually destruction of multiple joints. The damage goes even further, because rheumatoid arthritis also causes inflammation of the blood vessels and the outer lining of the heart and lungs. People who have rheumatoid arthritis also may have digestive problems, great fatigue, anaemia, ulcerative colitis, chronic lung and bronchial congestion, and liver malfunction.

Common factors include;

- calcium depletion
- gland and hormone imbalance, especially adrenal exhaustion
- prolonged use of aspirin and cortico-steroid drugs that eventually impair the body's own healing powers
- poor diet lacking fresh fruit and vegetables and high in acid and mucous forming foods and food allergens.

Rheumatoid arthritis is significantly more common in women than men and generally strikes people aged between 40 and 60. However, children and much older people may also be affected.

## What Causes Arthritis?

To understand what is going on when someone suffers from arthritis, let's look at how a joint works.



Cartilage covers the bone surface to stop the two bones from rubbing directly against each other. The covering of cartilage allows the joint to work smoothly and painlessly.

You don't want things to get caught between the bones of the joint as they move, so a 'capsule' surrounds the joint. The space inside the capsule (the joint cavity) contains a liquid called **synovial fluid**. You can't have blood vessels inside a joint- they would get crushed and destroyed. So the body sends blood vessels to the joint capsule, and then the oxygen and nutrients in the blood vessels pass into the synovial fluid. These nutrients nourish the joint and the cartilage. But **there is nothing to pump the fluid to the cartilage- the only way the cartilage can get the nutrients is for the bones to move backwards and forwards to push the synovial fluid around the joint**. The blood vessels to the capsule also absorb the wastes that the joint produces, so the synovial fluid must be moved around for this to happen as well.

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Arthritis is usually considered a 'wear and tear' condition, where the cartilage of the joint deteriorates over time. However, the body has an amazing ability to heal itself, with replacement cells being produced all the time. So why doesn't this happen when someone has arthritis? There are a few things that can cause the cartilage to break down or prevent the body from repairing it.

1. **Acidity-** if your body is too acidic, it deteriorates more quickly. Think of a nail in water and a nail in acid- obviously the second one breaks down much faster. Most people with arthritis have very acid systems, and until this is corrected, their joints will keep deteriorating.
2. **Lack of nutrients-** the list here is very long, but the main ones are zinc and vitamin C (which the body needs for repair of any damaged areas), as well as glucosamine and chondroitin, which are both needed to repair cartilage. Sometimes a lack of copper can worsen arthritis, and in these cases copper bracelets can help.
3. **Lack of blood to the joint capsule-** this is quite common, and usually caused by tight muscles around the joint constricting the blood vessels, or by sluggish circulation in the legs or hands.
4. **Chronic inflammation-** either from overuse, an old injury, or from existing deterioration.
5. **Lack of movement-** it is important to frequently move the joints through their full range, otherwise the synovial fluid will not get pushed to all parts of the joint. The synovial fluid is a bit like blood- if it is moving freely, all the tissues will get a good supply of oxygen and nutrients, and have their wastes cleared. Otherwise the tissues will suffer and deteriorate.
6. **Toxins-** unwanted chemicals can build up in different areas in our body and cause damage and inflammation.
7. **Rheumatoid Arthritis-** is a more complex condition, as it is mostly caused by the immune system attacking the joint. In these cases, treating the immune system to get it working correctly again is also essential.

## Treatments

### Movement

As you can see, under use and over use can both cause joint problems. Low- impact exercises that take the joints through their whole range of movement are ideal.

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Unfortunately, people who already have arthritis often find that movement of the joint is painful, so nutrients or herbs that reduce the pain and inflammation are important. As they say, 'If you don't use it you lose it!'

### **Acupuncture**

Quality acupuncture is wonderful for reducing the pain and inflammation of arthritis. It can also help to loosen the joint and allow a greater range of movement. Japanese acupuncture will help stimulate the body's repair systems and increase the blood supply to the joint, allowing it to repair more quickly and easily.

### **Naturopathy**

Herbs and supplements are used to reduce inflammation and relieve pain. A naturopath will also supply the right nutrients that the joint needs to replace the damaged cartilage and repair the joint. They will also improve the acidity of the body, and make sure that the person is correctly absorbing the right nutrients. Different foods will make the arthritis better or worse, so diet education is quite important. In particular, foods belonging to the night-shade group (potatoes, tomatoes, egg plants, chillies, and capsicums) are known to aggravate arthritis. Some foods cause or worsen inflammation, and some foods decrease inflammation, and a naturopath will go through this in detail with the client.

A thorough detox by a good naturopath will often help arthritis considerably.

### **Rheumatoid Arthritis**

Because it is caused by the immune system attacking the joint, often the first step is to check for any food intolerances or allergies (at our Clinic), and to treat any of these that show up. This helps the immune system to settle down and behave more correctly.

As well as improving the immune system, our therapists will use the osteoarthritis treatments for reducing pain and inflammation, and repairing the cartilage and other parts of the joint.

*Please see our special offer below, and contact the Clinic if you would like to have your arthritis assessed, to find out what the causes and the treatment options are for your particular case.*

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