

## **Arthritis**

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### ***What is arthritis?***

It is a condition where there is pain associated with swelling in the joints.

### ***How do I know whether I am suffering from arthritis?***

If you are having pain associated with swelling in the joints which lasts for more than six weeks then mostly you are suffering from arthritis. Arthritis can manifest in various ways. It can present as only early morning stiffness in the joints initially which could last from thirty minutes to one hour. Arthritis could also involve other systems of the body apart from joints.

### ***What are the different types of arthritis?***

Arthritis can be broadly classified into inflammatory and degenerative. In inflammatory arthritis swelling is predominant along with pain. In degenerative arthritis swelling is not predominant although pain could be present to the extent as in inflammatory arthritis.

Early morning stiffness lasts typically more than one hour in inflammatory arthritis but it lasts for only up to thirty minutes in non-inflammatory arthritis.

On moving the joints pain increases in degenerative arthritis and it decreases in inflammatory arthritis. Degenerative arthritis is mainly due to wear and tear of the joints.

### ***What are the different types of inflammatory arthritis?***

Rheumatoid arthritis, psoriatic arthritis, ankylosing spondylitis, enteropathic arthritis, reactive arthritis, gouty arthritis. Most common type of inflammatory arthritis is rheumatoid arthritis.

### ***Which is the most common type of degenerative arthritis?***

Osteoarthritis.

### ***Are there any risk factors for development of arthritis?***

There is no single definite risk factor for development of arthritis. In inflammatory arthritis viral infection, family history and smoking are implicated. Some patients with skin diseases like psoriasis can develop psoriatic arthritis at a later date.

When uric acid level in the blood exceeds more than the normal value for a prolonged period of time, it leads to gout in some patients. Not all patients with increased uric acid level in the blood develop gout.

### ***What is rheumatoid arthritis?***

It is the most common type of inflammatory arthritis. It involves joints of both hands equally. It can involve joints of the legs also. Pain associated with this kind of arthritis is

very severe. As mentioned earlier it can affect major organs like eyes, lungs, heart and Kidneys.

The benefit from treatment is best in the initial six months to a maximum of 2 years. If left untreated rheumatoid arthritis can lead to severe deformities.



### ***What is osteoarthritis?***

It is the most common type of degenerative arthritis. It occurs in overweight or obese individuals where the excess of body weight has to be borne by the knees. This strain leads to wear and tear in the joints. It can affect other joints than knees.

### ***What is gout?***

When the uric acid level in the blood increases above normal value it gets deposited in the joints. This leads to pain and swelling in the joints. This condition is called as gout. But as stated earlier not all patients with elevated uric acid levels in the blood will develop gout. Along with elevated uric acid levels certain local factors in the joints also will contribute to pain and swelling in the joints.



### ***Is there any diet modification which is recommended in patients with gout?***

There are certain food items which could contribute to elevated levels of uric acid levels in the blood. It is difficult to avoid all the food items causing this. So if the patients avoids milk and milk products, alcohol especially beer, sea foods, cauliflower and cabbage and red meat (mutton and beef) it would suffice. Patient can eat some chicken and small fishes (sardine). Apart from diet modifications patients should take drugs like allopurinol and colchicine for gout.

### ***Is there any arthritis that is affecting the spine?***

Yes. They are called as seronegative spondyloarthropathies. This group includes psoriatic arthritis, ankylosing spondylitis, enteropathic arthritis and reactive arthritis.

As a group it could be said that they affect the axial skeleton (spine) in particular and tend to fuse the joints of the spine which leads to decreased mobility of the spine. This particular group of arthritis affects the young individuals (men) which confounds the problems. Apart from medications, these patients should do exercises that will stretch the spine to prevent the fusion of the spine throughout their lives.

### ***Is there any treatment for arthritis in allopathy?***

Yes. Contrary to the beliefs there are medications which can control arthritis in allopathy. They are methotrexate, sulphasalazine, leflunomide and hydroxychloroquine. Choice of the medications depends on the severity and type of arthritis. Drugs during pregnancy and lactation differ.

***Is the treatment for arthritis life long?***

While taking the medications if the patient is not having any painful or swollen joints for continuous six months then the drugs can be tapered and stopped. This is true for most of the arthritis. Spontaneous remission in rheumatoid arthritis is 20%.

***Do I need to do anything else other than taking medications to control arthritis?***

Yes. In patients with osteoarthritis of the knees weight reduction and maintenance of ideal body weight will help the pain immensely. There are exercises like quadriceps exercises to strengthen the muscles around the knees which will also help to reduce the pain in the knees.

Smoking is an independent risk factor for development of rheumatoid arthritis. So cessation of smoking is important. Patients with gout would require diet modifications as mentioned earlier.

***What are the tests available to know the type and severity of arthritis?***

ESR (Erythrocyte sedimentation rate), CRP (C reactive protein), rheumatoid factor, Anti CCP antibodies (anti citrullinated peptide antibodies), HLA B27.

ANA (Antinuclear antibodies) is a test done to detect autoimmune diseases (a group of diseases where white cells in the blood attack body's own cells) like systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE). In this particular group of diseases arthritis could be a minor manifestation as it can have more severe manifestations involving major organs in the body.

All the above tests are done in KMC Mangalore.

***When should I consult a rheumatologist?***

Rheumatologist is a doctor who is exclusively trained in managing rheumatic diseases like arthritis. If you have pain and swelling in any of the joints or if you have unusual early morning stiffness in the joints you need to see a rheumatologists. Apart from this if you hear a sound while moving the joints along with pain associated with it, it is advisable to see a rheumatologist.

