What is arthritis?

ARTHRITIS INFORMATION SHEET

This sheet gives a general description of arthritis. It may be helpful if you are unsure if you have arthritis. It provides general information about how arthritis is diagnosed and what you can do to manage it. It also tells you where you can find more information.

What does arthritis mean?

Arthritis is a name for a group of conditions affecting the joints. These conditions cause damage to the joints, usually resulting in pain and stiffness. Arthritis can affect many different parts of the joint and nearly every joint in the body.

Is rheumatism different to arthritis?

Not really. Rheumatism is just a more general word that was used in the past. It described any pain in your bones, muscles and joints. We know more about problems with bones, muscles and joints, so we use words like back pain, tendonitis and arthritis to describe these conditions now.

Are there different types of arthritis?

There are over 100 forms of arthritis. Each type of arthritis affects you and your joints in different ways. Some forms of arthritis can also involve other parts of the body, such as the eyes. The most common forms of arthritis are:

- osteoarthritis
- rheumatoid arthritis
- gout
- psoriatic arthritis
- ankylosing spondylitis.

Who gets arthritis?

Anyone can get arthritis, including children and young people. In Australia, one in seven people have arthritis. Many people think arthritis is a normal part of getting older. This is not true. In fact two out of every three people with arthritis are between 15 and 60 years old. Arthritis can affect people from all backgrounds, ages and lifestyles.

What are the symptoms?

Arthritis affects people in different ways but the most common symptoms are:

- pain
- stiffness or reduced movement of a joint
- swelling in a joint
- redness and warmth in a joint
- general symptoms, such as tiredness, weight loss or feeling unwell.

Is my sore joint arthritis?

There are many different reasons why your joints may be sore. Not all pain in muscles and joints is caused by arthritis. It could be from an injury or using your joints and muscles in an unusual way (for example, playing a new sport or lifting heavy boxes). Talk to your doctor if you have pain and stiffness that:

- starts for no clear reason
- lasts for more than a few days
- comes on with swelling, redness and warmth of your joints.

How can I find out if I have arthritis?

See your doctor as soon as possible if you have symptoms of arthritis. Your doctor will ask you about your symptoms and examine your joints. They may do some tests or x-rays, but these can be normal in the early stages of arthritis. It may take several visits before your doctor can tell what type of arthritis you have. This is because some types of arthritis can be hard to diagnose in the early stages. Your doctor may also send you to a rheumatologist, a doctor who specialises in arthritis, for more tests.

Is there a cure for arthritis?

Currently there is no cure for most forms of arthritis. While there are treatments that can effectively control symptoms, you should be wary of any products or treatments that claim to cure arthritis.

Can arthritis be treated?

Many types of arthritis can be easily and effectively controlled by modern treatment. Early diagnosis and the right treatment can ease symptoms and may even prevent damage to your joints. Research has led to great improvements in this area. Because arthritis affects people in different ways, treatment has to be tailored to the needs of each person. It is important to work with your healthcare team to find treatments that suit you.

What can I do?

The good news is that there are many simple things you can do to live well with arthritis:

- **find out what type of arthritis** is affecting you and learn about your treatment options
- **stay active:** keep your joints moving and your muscles strong
- **learn ways to manage pain:** there are many things you can do to help you cope with pain
- **manage tiredness:** learn to balance rest and your normal activities
- **keep to a healthy weight:** there is no diet that can cure arthritis but a well balanced diet is best for your general health
- **look after and protect your joints:** find out about equipment and gadgets that can make tasks easier
- **acknowledge your feelings and seek support:** as there is currently no cure for arthritis it is natural to feel scared, frustrated, sad and sometimes angry. Be aware of these feelings and get help if they start affecting your daily life.

CONTACT YOUR LOCAL ARTHRITIS OFFICE FOR MORE INFORMATION SHEETS ON ARTHRITIS.

There are things you can do to live well with arthritis.
Find out what type of arthritis is affecting you.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Websites:
www.arthritisaustralia.com.au for more information on arthritis

Australian Rheumatology Association - information about seeing a rheumatologist and arthritis medicines
www.rheumatology.org.au

Arthritis Foundation (US) www.arthritis.org

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