

Osteoarthritis (OA) is the most common form of arthritis that affects the joints. A joint is where two bones meet. The hip joint is often affected by OA.

It is a "ball and socket" joint formed by the pelvic bones (the socket) and the end of the thigh bone (the ball).

Surfaces of joints are covered in hard smooth tissue called cartilage, which allows movement with reduced friction. This cartilage can become damaged and worn.

The bone tissue next to the cartilage can also be affected and bony growths can develop around the joint edges. These growths are called osteophytes and may be seen on x-rays.

The joints and the tissues around the joints can also become inflamed. This inflammation is called synovitis. When this is happening, pain may be experienced.

What causes osteoarthritis?

Many factors can play a role in causing OA, including:

- Age. OA becomes more common as you get older.
- Genetics. You may develop OA if it runs in your family.
- Obesity. Knee and hip OA are more likely to develop or be more severe in obese people. This is because there is an increased load on the joints and a potential for more joint damage.
- Sex. Women are more likely to develop OA than men.
- Previous joint injury, damage or deformity. For example, this may include previous joint infection, a previous fracture (break), or ligament injury.

How common is it?

It is very common. OA causes joint pain in around 8.5 million people in the UK.

OA is more common as you get older but it is not just part of getting older.

What are the symptoms of hip OA?

Common symptoms include:

- Pain, stiffness, and limitation in full movement of the joint are typical. The stiffness tends to be worse first thing in the morning. It tends to loosen up after half an hour or so.
- You may have poor mobility and problems walking if the hip is badly affected. This may make you more likely to have a fall.
- You may have difficulty in putting on shoes and socks and getting in and out of a car.

No symptoms

Quite a number of people have X-ray changes that show OA, but have no, or only very mild, symptoms. The opposite can also be true. That is, you may have quite severe symptoms but with only minor changes seen on the X-ray.

What tests may be done?

If you see a healthcare professional they will ask you questions and carry out a clinical examination to help establish the cause of your problem.

You may be offered an X-ray of your hip.

What are my treatment options?

There is no cure for OA but there are a number of things that can be done to ease symptoms.

Remember, something can usually be done to help. You don't have to live with pain or disability, various treatments may help.

For anyone with OA, the aims of treatment should be to:

- help you to understand the condition and how to manage it
- reduce any pain and stiffness
- maintain or improve the mobility of your affected joint or joints
- limit any joint damage and any disability that may result from your OA

You can find more [information about treating muscle, bone and joint problems](#) in the NHS Inform Musculoskeletal (MSK) Zone.

General measures to help treat osteoarthritis

- Weight control — If you are overweight, try to lose some weight as the extra load can make symptoms worse. Even a modest weight loss can make quite a difference.
- Walking aids — If you have hip pain when walking, you could try using a walking stick. Hold it in the hand on the opposite side of the body to the affected joint. This takes some pressure off the affected joint and helps to ease symptoms in some cases. [Click here for more information on all of this](#)
- Physiotherapy — Sometimes advice from a physiotherapist can be helpful. For example: Advice on which exercises to do to strengthen the muscles around the hip joint (as pain can lead to these becoming weaker), how to keep active and fit and how to use walking aids properly.
- Stretching around affected joints may be helpful. This is something that physiotherapists may also be able to help with. Some exercises might also help.

Applying heat

Heat helps prepare the tissues for stretching and is recommended before beginning each exercise sessions.

The preferable method of heating is in a warm shower or bath for 10 to 15 minutes. Local heat, for example with a wheat pad or a damp towel warmed in a microwave is an alternative, but may not be as effective.

Exercise

If possible, exercise regularly. This helps to strengthen muscles, keep you fit, and keep a good range of joint movement.

Swimming is ideal for most joints, but any exercise is better than none. Many people can manage a regular walk but avoid high impact activities such as running and jumping.

You can find some [simple exercise to get you started](#) in the Musculoskeletal (MSK) Zone on NHS inform.

Surgery for osteoarthritis

Most people with OA do not have it badly enough to need surgery. However OA of a joint may become severe in most cases.

The hip can be replaced with an artificial joint when the OA is having a big impact on your ability to walk or sleep well.

Further information

If you have a muscle, bone or joint problem, visit the [MSK Zone](#) on NHS inform for self-management advice and exercises to get you moving normally, and safely.