

# What is Arthritis?

Arthritis is a natural ageing process. Like grey hair and wrinkles. We have changes happening on the insides of our bodies as well as the outside.

## The characterisation of Osteoarthritis:

- The cushioning between the knee known as cartilage gradually roughens and becomes thin and the bone underneath thickens.
- The bone at the edge of the joint grows outwards (this forms osteophytes or bony spurs)
- The fluid lubricating the joint known as the synovium swells slightly and may produce extra fluid
- The ligaments which help to support the joint slowly thicken and contract
- Muscles that move the joint may weaken and become thin or wasted

## Symptoms of osteoarthritis of the knee are:

- pain
- stiffness (especially after rest – this usually eases after a minute or so as you get moving)
- crepitus, a creaking, crunching or grinding sensation when you move the joint
- hard swellings (caused by osteophytes)
- soft swellings (caused by extra fluid in the joint).
- your knee giving way because your muscles have become weak
- the muscles around your joint looking thin or wasted.

You'll probably find that your pain will vary and that you have good days and bad days, sometimes depending on how active you've been but sometimes for no clear reason.

Some people find that changes in the weather (especially damp weather and low pressure) make their pain and stiffness worse. This may be because nerve fibres in the capsule of their knee are sensitive to changes in atmospheric pressure.

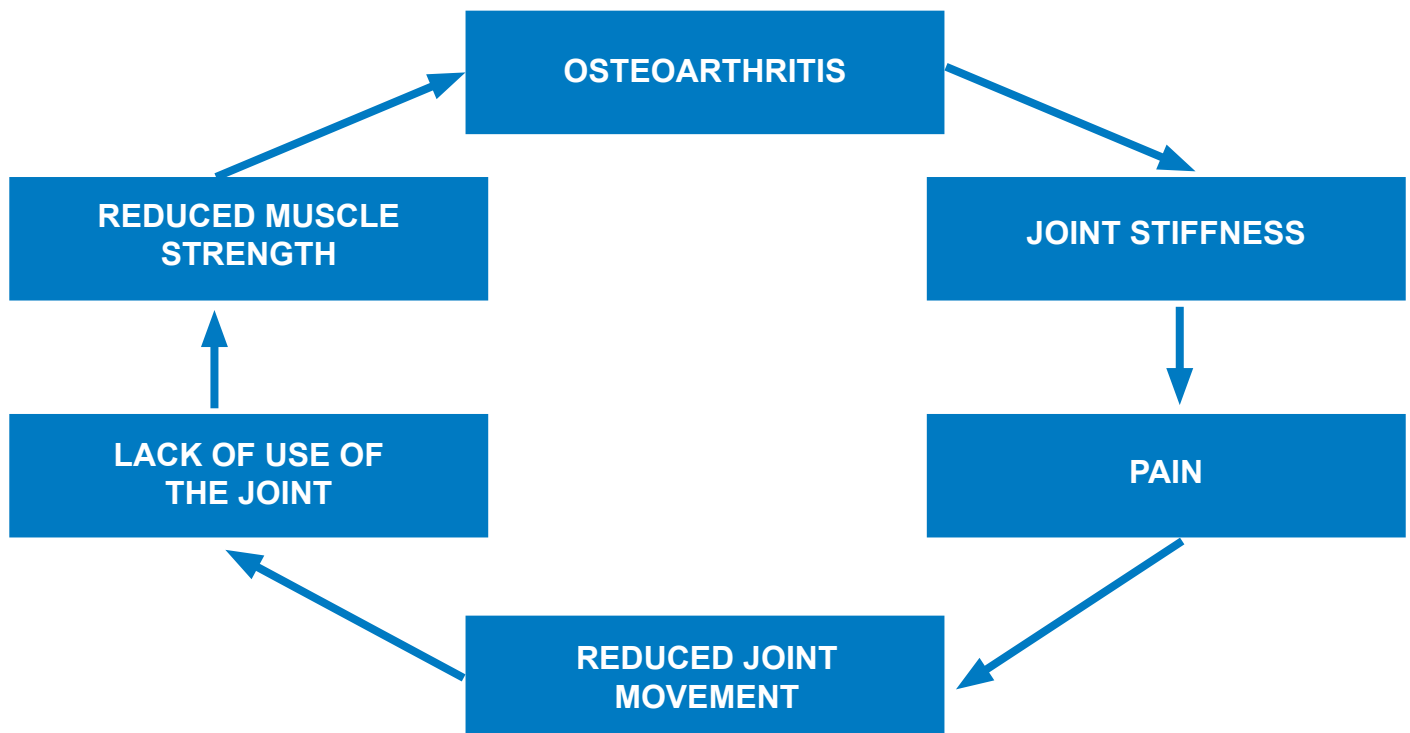
## Important points to remember

- Arthritis is a normal ageing process
- There are things you can do to improve and manage your symptoms

Although this is a normal aging process there are many factors that contribute to the development of osteoarthritis such as previous trauma and increased weight. One of the single highest risk factors for developing osteoarthritis is being overweight. If you have osteoarthritis and are overweight then the disease will progress at a much higher rate than somebody who is of a normal weight.

## Exercise

A natural response to pain is avoiding activity in fear of damaging our joints. This results in stiffening of our joints and weakening of our muscles resulting in further pain and more load on the joint.



It's very important to keep your joints moving. You need to find the right balance between rest and exercise – little and often is usually the best approach.

**There are 3 types of exercise that you'll need to do:**

### 1. Range of movement exercises

- These aim to reduce stiffness and keep your joint moving. They also help decrease swelling by working the “muscle pump” to disperse fluid

### 2. Strengthening exercises

- These aim to maintain or increase the muscle strength around your knee joint to take the pressure off your joint

### 3. Aerobic exercises

- These are exercises that raise your heart-rate working your heart and lungs. The better your heart can pump oxygen around your body the longer the muscles can work for without tiring.
- Exercise to raise your heart rate stimulates the production of “endorphins” which are the body’s own natural painkillers and feel-good hormones.

#### Examples include;

- Walking, cycling, bowling, swimming / aqua-aerobics, a round of golf.
- Basically any activity that raises your heart-rate.

The secret is to start small, and then gradually stretch the activity bit by bit. Taking up exercise with a friend or family maybe can really help. Encourage friends and family members to join you in a walking program or swimming class. Make it family time rather than enforced exercise time.

### Summary

People with osteoarthritis often stop exercising because they misinterpret the meaning of pain. If an activity causes an increase in pain for 1 to 2 hours afterward, that's a signal to modify or adapt the exercise - not to stop it altogether!

Not just any exercise, but proper exercise, is the key. When you move, be sure to use the affected joints. These are like rusty hinges: you have to keep oiling them or they'll freeze up. Perform range-of-motion exercises, in which the joint is moved as far as possible, every day. Don't "favour" one knee or hip; this is likely to reduce overall body strength.

### Self-Management

There are a number of ways you can help to manage your pain.

#### Heat

Heat can help to reduce stiffness and pain

There are many different ways that you may apply heat to your knee;

- Gel packs
- Wheat bags
- Hot baths/showers
- Heat rubs

#### Ice

Ice can be used to help decrease the level of inflammation in a joint or a muscle. Use it when the joint is particularly swollen and painful to decrease the body’s inflammatory response. This is particularly useful during “flare ups”.

You can apply ice in many different ways, they include: -

- Gel packs
- Ice packs place some ice cubes in a bag and wrap them in a wet towel
- Frozen peas of vegetables
- Ice massage
- Cooling sprays

Useful tip – cling film is a very useful to wrap an ice pack to your knee

**You should only apply ice for between 10-20 minutes at a time every 2-3 hours. Make sure that you do not apply ice direct to the skin as it will cause an ice burn, ALWAYS wrap ice in a wet towel prior to application**

## Medication

**Always speak to your GP or Pharmacist before taking any medication or using any topical creams.**

There are many types of drugs that can be used to treat osteoarthritis, they all act in slightly different ways, and as with all drugs they are not suitable for everyone. Below is some information about the most common drugs used with arthritis.

### Paracetamol

Paracetamol is normally offered as a first line pain killer in osteoarthritis. It is best taken regularly to take the pain away rather than 'now and again' when the pain flares up. It has relatively few side-effects and often gives adequate pain control in osteoarthritis.

### Anti-Inflammatory Painkillers (NSAIDs)

#### Topical

Some anti-inflammatory painkillers are available as creams or gels that can be applied directly to the affected joint to relieve pain and inflammation. They can be used instead of, or in addition to paracetamol. Some of these are available over the counter, without a prescription. A topical preparation of an anti-inflammatory painkiller has fewer side-effects than anti-inflammatory tablets.

#### Oral

Anti-inflammatory painkillers taken orally are prescribed less frequently than paracetamol because they have a higher risk of side-effects. However, if paracetamol and topical anti-inflammatory painkillers do not work oral anti-inflammatories can be an option. These tablets can be taken instead of, or in conjunction with paracetamol. There are many different options e.g. Ibuprofen, Naproxen, Diclofenac. If one does not suit then another can be tried.

**Do not use topical and oral NSAIDs together**

## Self Help Techniques

### Supports

Medical research is divided regarding the use of supports in osteoarthritic conditions as on the one hand they increase the stability of a joint and help decrease swelling, however on the other hand they can cause stiffness and muscle wastage.

### Footwear

Comfort should be the main consideration when choosing shoes. Look for a flexible sole with shock absorbing properties if possible. An alternative is to consider getting shock-absorbing insoles.

### How to manage a flare

You'll probably find that your pain will vary and that you have good days and bad days, sometimes depending on how active you've been but sometimes for no clear reason.

When your symptoms are flared there are some things you can do to help reduce the symptoms.

### Modify Exercises

Continue with gentle range of motion exercises. Avoid exercises that aggravate pain

### Activity Modification

Avoid or minimise activities that aggravate symptoms

Short course of topical or oral Anti-Inflammatory Painkillers (NSAIDs) can be used to help reduce symptoms when flared.

**Always speak to your GP or Pharmacist before taking any medication or using any topical creams.**

## Pacing

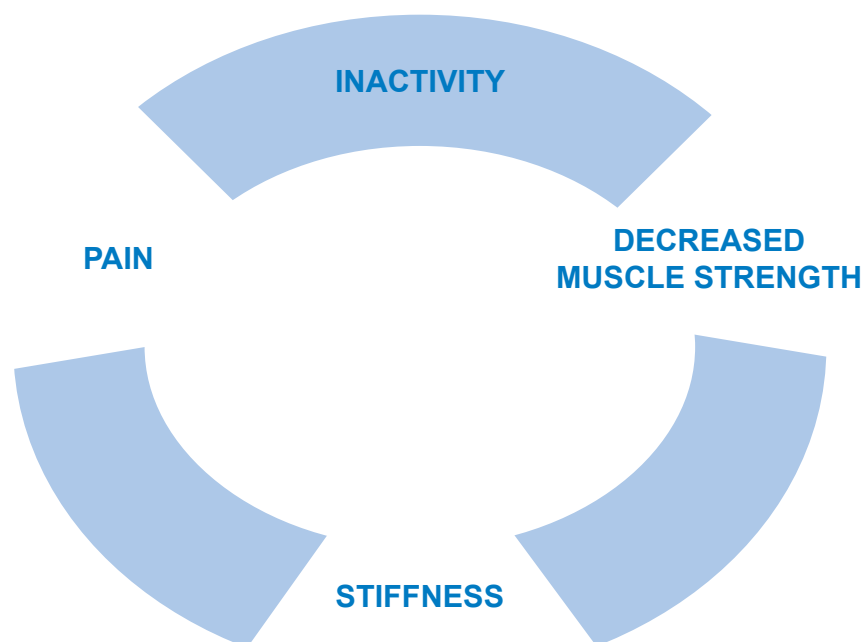
### What is pacing?

Pacing basically means altering your daily activity patterns, Splitting up tasks and taking regular breaks **before** pain starts. Ensuring individuals stay active. Pacing is excellent in theory but putting it into practice involves a little bit of forward planning and trial and error! The emphasis is about staying active but not overdoing it.

This may involve on a bad day staying at home and have your friends visit you, whereas on a good day you may want to take the bus and meet them for a coffee for example.

Many people fall into the trap of doing too little in the short term to avoid their pain unfortunately this in the long term can ultimately increase your pain.

Take a look at the diagram below think what you can do about each of the four problems?



### A useful technique to use the “CPR of pacing”

- Clarify** - Is a particular activity or doing the activity for too long causing your pain to worsen.
- Prioritise** - What activities are essential and what can be done at a later date. Set realistic goals or targets for you to achieve, e.g. if you need to weed the garden, don't do it all at once, split it up over a few hours or even come back to it the next day.
- Rest** - Remember to pencil in time for rest, it allows the muscles and joints time to recuperate and you to catch your breath.

### Where to continue exercising

#### Calderdale

Better Living service – a free 12-week exercise and healthy weight programme run leisure centres and community halls across Calderdale. Members benefit from unlimited use of Calderdale Council's Active Lifestyles card for use in the gyms, swimming pools and exercise classes - free of charge for twelve weeks. After this all these activities can be enjoyed at a reduced rate. If you wish to register please call 01422 230230. You can also be referred by your Physiotherapist or GP if you meet any of the following criteria:

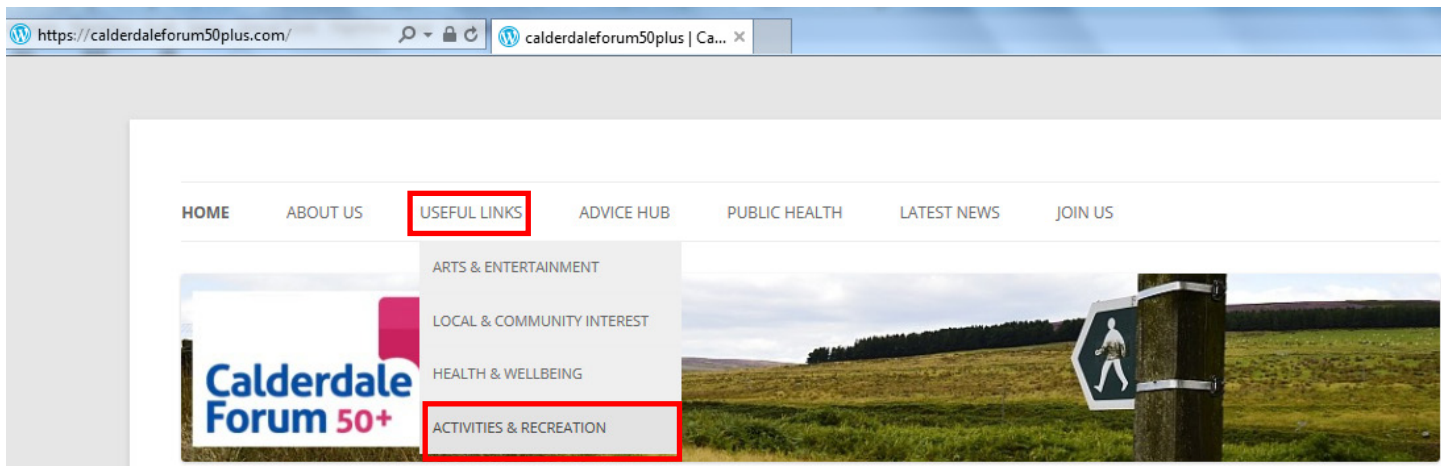
- Diabetes
- Angina
- High blood pressure
- Coronary Heart Disease (CHD)
- Cardiovascular Disease (CVD)
- You have been told by your GP that you are 'at risk' of developing CVD.

**Walk It Together CREW** - a registered charity that provides a programme of led walks throughout Calderdale to suit people of all ages and abilities. They're a great way to be more active, improve your health and make new friends.

For more information contact 07599 080666 or visit [www.crewheartsupport.co.uk](http://www.crewheartsupport.co.uk)

**Calderdale Forum 50+** - Plus aims to support and represent people aged 50 and over in Calderdale and to promote a collective voice on issues that matter to them. Highlight information and issues which are useful and important to this age group. Visit [www.calderdaleforum50plus.com](http://www.calderdaleforum50plus.com) for more information.

For more information regarding activities including Tai Chi, exercise groups and social groups - Click on the useful links tab and click Activities and Recreation.



**Southowram Over Fifties' Activities (SOFA)** – offers people primarily 50+ within the community of Southowram and surrounding areas, a range of fun activities to help promote their health and wellbeing. The activities include tai chi, new age kurling, table tennis and line dancing. The activities will cost £2 per session.

For more information regarding venues and times contact Pete on 01422 346204.

**Club 50+** – Activities for people aged 50 and over, which is suitable for men and women at all Leisure Centres. Activities include table tennis, badminton, fitness classes, tap dancing, bowls, line dancing and much more. Please contact your Leisure Centre for more details

## Kirklees

**Kirklees Wellness Scheme** – Throughout this scheme you can take part in group or individual activity programmes, including swimming, exercise classes, sports activities, walking, cycling, dance classes, tai chi and the gym. You can be referred by your Physiotherapist, Doctor or Practice Nurse.

**OWLS** (The Over 50's Weekday Leisure Scheme) – This offers daytime leisure activities including swimming, fitness classes, badminton, table tennis, interactive dance mats, Wii sports, gym, line dancing and much more. Please contact your Leisure Centre for more details

**Aged Concern** – run various activities including: - Wii Get Active sessions, belly dancing classes, healthy walks and swimming classes.

Please contact Kelly Watson, Fit as a Fiddle Co-Ordinator on 01422 252040 or 079404 91171

## Web Address:

<http://www.cht.nhs.uk/services/clinical-services/physiotherapy-outpatients/patient-careinformation/>

## QR Code:

Scan the QR code below to take you to our website.



**If you have any comments about this leaflet or the service you have received you can contact :**

Physiotherapy Department  
Huddersfield Royal Infirmary

Telephone 01484 342434

MSK Physiotherapy Admin Office: 01484 905380

[www.cht.nhs.uk](http://www.cht.nhs.uk)

**If you would like this information in another format or language contact the above.**

Potřebujete-li tyto informace v jiném formátu nebo jazyce,  
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prosimy skontaktować się z nami, korzystając z ww.  
danych kontaktowych

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اگر آپ کو یہ معلومات کسی اور فارمیٹ طرزبان میں درکار ہوں، تو  
برائے مہربانی مندرجہ بالا شعبے میں ہم سے رابطہ کریں۔

"إذا احتجت الحصول على هذه المعلومة بشكل مغاير أو مترجمة إلى لغة مختلفة فيرجى منك الاتصال بالقسم  
المذكور أعلاه"