



**DES MOINES  
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**ARTHRITIS**

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***Question: What is arthritis?***

***Answer:*** The term “arthritis” simply means joint inflammation. While there are several types of arthritis, one of the most common is Osteoarthritis. This type is also known as degenerative arthritis, degenerative joint disease or “wear and tear” arthritis. It affects an estimated sixteen million Americans.

***Question: What causes Osteoarthritis?***

***Answer:*** Osteoarthritis occurs with the aging process or can result from an injury to the affected joint earlier in life. Obesity also increases the risk of developing wear and tear changes in joints. Osteoarthritis usually begins in one or more of the large weight bearing joints, like the hips and knees. The soft cartilage covering on the bone ends that form the joint begin to thin and wear away. With progression, the joint may actually have areas of exposed bone, resulting in “bone on bone” contact. This causes constant irritation in the joint with symptoms including pain, swelling and limited range of motion. Walking increases the pain. Nighttime joint pain is also a common complaint with Osteoarthritis.

***Question: What are the treatment options for Osteoarthritis?***

***Answer:*** Physicians usually recommend conservative treatment first. This may include anti-inflammatory pills, modification of activities and weight loss, if needed. Exercise is still a good idea but “non weight bearing” programs like swimming, stationary bicycling and leg strengthening are preferred. Walking is still recommended but shorter distances may be advisable. Cortisone injections are often times given for arthritic joints. Another type of injection is also available for the knees. These are called “visco-supplementation” shots. The fluid injected into the knee joint is very much like healthy joint fluid. It increases the viscosity (density) of the fluid in the knee. This improves the lubrication in the joint and hopefully slows the break down of remaining cartilage. It is most beneficial for patients with mild to moderate Osteoarthritis. While it does not cure the arthritis, patients report an improvement in function and decreased pain for anywhere from six weeks to six months or more. Joint replacements are an option for advanced arthritis. These can be performed on hips, knees, shoulders, elbows and sometimes ankles. The goal of any joint replacement is to decrease pain and improve function.

***Question: What’s new or proposed for the future treatment of Osteoarthritis?***

***Answer:*** New anti-inflammatory medications are being developed all the time. Studies are currently under way to determine if “visco supplementation” shots could also be useful in hip joints. Partial joint replacements are available for people with arthritis affecting limited portions of the joint. Injectable cartilage or cartilage replacements are still experimental or hypothetical at the current time, but who knows in the future!

*Dr. Fellows is an orthopaedic surgeon at Des Moines Orthopaedic Surgeons, P.C. Dr. Fellow’s manages all area of orthopaedics including fracture care, joint replacement, arthroscopy, shoulder surgery, and foot and ankle surgery. To reach Dr. Fellows or his nurse Jody, please call (515) 224-1414.*