

What Are Osteoporosis and Arthritis and How Are They Different?

Fast Facts: An Easy-to-Read Series of Publications for the Public

Osteoporosis and arthritis are easy to confuse. This fact sheet explains how they are alike and how they differ.

What Is Osteoporosis?

Osteoporosis is a disease that makes bones weak and more likely to break. People with osteoporosis most often break bones in the hip, spine, and wrist. Osteoporosis is called the “silent disease” because bone is lost with no symptoms. You may not know you have osteoporosis until a strain, bump, or fall causes a bone to break.

There is no cure for osteoporosis, but there are ways to prevent and treat the disease. They include:

- A diet rich in calcium and vitamin D
- Daily exercise
- Medicines.

What Is Arthritis?

Arthritis affects the joints and nearby tissues. Joints are places in the body where bones meet, such as the elbows and knees. The two most common types of arthritis are osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis.

- Osteoarthritis (OA) is a joint disease that causes pain in the hips, knees, neck, back, or hands. Being overweight, playing sports, and overusing joints in other ways can hurt them and lead to OA. With time, the cushions on the ends of the bones in the joint get thin or wear off, and the bones can rub against each other.
- Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is a disease that strikes joints in the hands and feet. In rheumatoid arthritis, the body attacks its own healthy tissues. This damages the lining of joints and causes pain, swelling, and stiffness.

How Are Osteoporosis and Arthritis Different?

Osteoporosis and osteoarthritis are sometimes confused because their names sound the same. But these illnesses have different:

- Symptoms
- Diagnosis
- Treatment.

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People with OA do not often have osteoporosis. Because some of the medicines used to treat RA cause bone loss, people with RA may get osteoporosis. Bone loss in RA may also occur as a direct result of the disease.

How Do People With Osteoporosis and Arthritis Cope?

If you have osteoporosis or arthritis, exercise can help. It can build strength, improve posture, and increase range of motion. Some examples are:

- Low-impact aerobics
- Swimming
- Tai chi
- Low-stress yoga.

People with osteoporosis should try not to bend forward, twist the spine, or lift heavy weights. People with arthritis need to learn ways to cope with joints that don't move well and may be unstable. It is important to check with your doctor to learn what types of exercise are safe for you.

What About Pain?

Most people with arthritis have pain every day. But people with osteoporosis often only need pain relief if they break a bone. Ways to manage pain are similar for people with osteoporosis, OA, and RA and include pain medications, certain types of exercise, physical therapy, and sometimes surgery.

For More Information on Osteoporosis or Arthritis:

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For Your Information

For updates and for any questions about any medications you are taking, please contact the U.S. Food and Drug Administration at 1-888-INFO-FDA (1-888-463-6332, a toll-free call) or visit their Web site at www.fda.gov.