



Health & Wellbeing



I HAVE BEEN TOLD I HAVE ARTHRITIS, BUT WHAT TYPE IS IT?

A lot of the time we are told that joint aches and pains are due to arthritis - and sometimes this is true!

But did you know that there are different types of arthritis and that they present in different ways? This also means that they need to be treated and managed differently to enable you to live life to the full.

The different types of arthritis are:

- **Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA)** - is an autoimmune disease where inflammatory periods result in deformed, painful, stiff and swollen joints. Typically, this is in your hands and feet, but you can get it in your other joints. It can be managed with strengthening and mobility exercises during the non-inflammatory periods and disease modifying anti-rheumatic drugs to reduce the occurrence of flare-ups. Activities such as knitting, piano playing and cross stitch can help with keeping hands and fingers mobile and to reduce physical changes.

Zoe Birch is a Chartered Physiotherapist and founder of PhysioMotion, which operate a clinic at Green Park as well as providing physiotherapy at home. In her latest article Zoe discusses a condition that affect a huge number of people.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF ARTHRITIS



X-ray showing osteoarthritis changes.

- **Osteoarthritis (OA)** - is characterised by changes in your joints at the joint surfaces. It is diagnosed using X-rays and MRI scans, which will show thinning of the cartilage that coats the end of the bones and thickening of the bone to increase the weight-bearing surface. This may result in the joint being in an abnormal position over time and affects the soft tissue around the joint, which is what gives you the pain. OA is managed with soft tissue massage to release muscles that have become tight and are restricting movement of the joint, or making it more difficult to adequately contract your muscle to move easily. An exercise programme to regain full joint mobility and increase muscular strength around the affected joints can also be helpful to ensure that you can move your body in a controlled manner without overloading certain parts.

- **Psoriatic Arthritis** - is a long-term inflammatory arthritis that occurs in people affected by the autoimmune disease psoriasis. The classic features of psoriatic arthritis include pain and inflammation around the joints, dactylitis (painful swelling of the entire finger or toe), skin lesions, nail lesions and fatigue. Due to the nature of the disease, activities with low impact are best for you to perform, such as swimming, yoga and walking. Also a physiotherapist can provide you with a tailored programme to strengthen around the joints that are affected. A rheumatologist may recommend anti-inflammatories or corticosteroids during the flare-ups, and in addition disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARDs) or biological treatments to manage the disease. You should look at avoiding smoking and follow a diet that reduces inflammation, which includes fatty fish, nuts, lean meats, vegetables and healthy fats.

- **Gout** - is caused mainly by too much uric acid in the body, resulting in crystals forming in the joints which causes them to become swollen, red and painful. You're more likely to get it if you eat a lot of red meat, some types of fish, fruit juice, red wine and sugary drinks. This disease is easily managed by modifications in your diet that cause high levels of uric acid and reducing your alcohol intake. There are also two types of medication that your GP or rheumatologist can prescribe to you depending if you are managing your uric acid levels or

treating an acute attack of gout. From a physiotherapy point of view, to help prevent gout we'll provide you with an exercise programme to strengthen and mobilise the joints that are stiff and weak, but also provide you with general strengthening exercises. This is good to manage this condition, as it will reduce the amount of stress on your joints. If your gout is due to liver function, it's really important to drink plenty of water to avoid dehydration.

- **Fibromyalgia** - is a chronic (long-lasting) disorder that causes pain and tenderness throughout the body. You can also have symptoms of fatigue, headaches, depression, brain fog, digestive problems, memory problems, hypersensitivity and trouble sleeping. This is different to Polymyalgia Rheumatica, which is a condition that causes pain, stiffness and inflammation in the muscles around the shoulders, neck and hips. Flare-ups for fibromyalgia can be triggered by emotional stress, change in diet, hormonal changes and lack of sleep. Fibromyalgia needs a combination of interventions to help with manage the different symptoms that could include: analgesia, sleep therapy and cognitive behavioural therapy, stress management and antidepressants. Physiotherapy can help with maintaining and building your strength and mobility around the areas of the body that affected, but also provided general exercise advice to help with sleep, stress and digestion.
- **Reactive Arthritis (Reiter's Syndrome)** - is a form of inflammatory arthritis that develops in response to an infection in another part of the body. Thankfully it will only last for less than a year. Typically you will experience joint pain and stiffness in your lower back, knees, ankles and/or feet. But you can also have eye pain, gastrointestinal symptoms, increase in frequency or pain when urinating, skin rashes, achilles tendinitis or heel pain, joint swelling in fingers and toes, or flu-like symptoms. This is different to Bacterial Arthritis that is inflammation in one or more of your joints caused by an infection entering the joint through the bloodstream, bone infection, penetrating injury or complication of joint surgery. Symptoms include pain, swelling and limited mobility in your joint and will resolve with rapid treatment of intravenous antibiotics and draining the infected fluid.



Exercise helps all arthritis.

Reactive arthritis is treated with antibiotics and anti-inflammatories, but to manage our symptoms it may be worth seeing a physiotherapist who can recommend exercises to manage joint and muscle stiffness, as well as maintaining strength in the body while you are recovering without causing additional strain.

- **Ankylosing Spondylitis (AS)** - is a chronic autoimmune disease that causes inflammation predominantly in the spine and sacroiliac joints (between lower spine and pelvis). Like other arthritis it causes pain and stiffness in these areas, but it also causes digestive symptoms, rashes and weight loss. This is different to Enteropathic Arthritis which is a type of arthritis associated with inflammatory bowel disease. The symptoms are joint pain and tenderness mostly in arms and legs, abdominal pain, bloody diarrhoea, weight loss, skin conditions, uveitis (inflammation of the eye's middle layer that helps with focusing and absorbing light) and low grade fever. AS can be



Arthritis can affect all joints

managed well with physiotherapy when provided with an exercise programme to maintain mobility in your spine and pelvis, as well as strengthening around these areas to reduce stiffness and stop the disease getting worse. You may need to take anti-inflammatories intermittently for short periods if you have flare-ups of the disease. Biological disease modifying anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARDs) may be required if you are unable to stop the progress of the disease with just exercise.

- **Cervical Spondylosis** - is also known as arthritis of the neck due to the changes in the vertebral column. Common symptoms are pain, stiffness, muscle spasms, clicking on movement of the neck, dizziness and headaches. People rarely need surgical intervention and physiotherapy will treat your symptoms by releasing muscle tension, and by providing mobility and strengthening exercises tailored to the restrictions and areas of weakness. We would also have a look at your mobility and strength in your arms and trunk that could contribute to neck pain and stiffness.

So if you are told you have arthritis, it is really important to find out what type it is. This can help you understand what symptoms you might experience, who you might need to see to manage the different symptoms, and how you can maintain participating in the activities you enjoy or take up some new ones!!

PhysioMotion Ltd

10 Stratton Street,
London, W1J 8LG
www.physiomotionlimited.co.uk
020 3422 6655