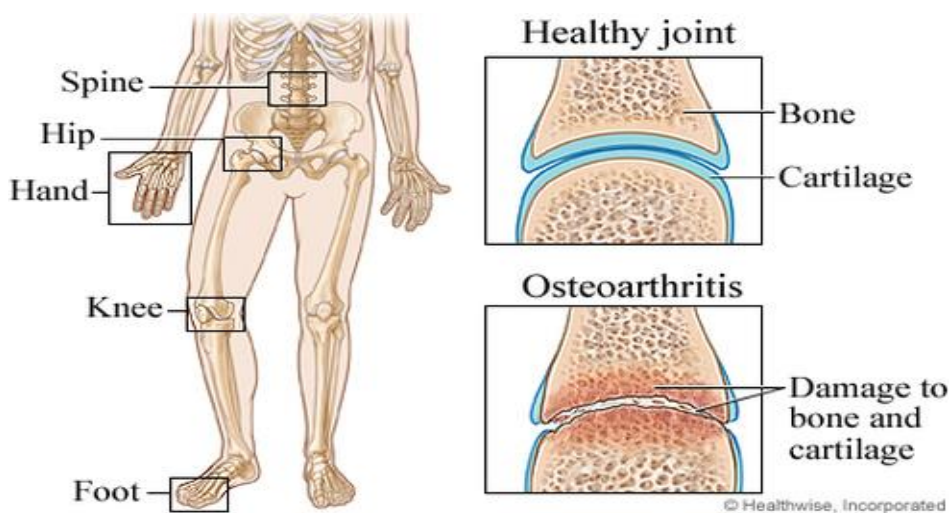


Osteoarthritis Information

Definition:

Osteoarthritis is a painful degenerative disease of the small joints within the body. There are some joints that are affected more than others, such as the hands, neck and knees. Osteoarthritis is due to 'wear and tear' on the cartilage that surrounds the joint. This cartilage begins to wear away allowing the two adjacent bones to rub onto each other. The lack of cartilage causes pain with any movement of the affected joint.

Post traumatic osteoarthritis is caused by an injury that has changed the alignment of the joint. This



causes the cartilage between the joints to degenerate and over time forms traumatic arthritis.

Your doctor will have asked you a series of questions about your symptoms, including when the pain began, the severity of the pain, joint stiffness and swelling as well as any joint movement limitations. You might also find your doctor noting any difficulty that you may be having with grasping objects such as a coin, turning a key or opening a jar.

Your doctor might request x-rays in order to determine the severity of the cartilage degeneration and if any bony spurs are noted. X-rays however may not correlate with the amount of pain and/or disability that you are experiencing.

Treatment:

Osteoarthritis of the hand, with the correct diagnosis, can be treated and a full functional lifestyle can be achieved, provided the correct joint protection techniques are learnt and adhered to in all daily tasks. With regards to treatment of osteoarthritis it is very important to prevent any progression of the

disease and decrease the amount of pain that you are experiencing with regards to your daily tasks.

There are a number of treatment options and combinations of treatment for osteoarthritis:

- Oral medication, painkillers and NSAIDS (non steroidal anti-inflammatory)
- Occupational Therapy- Hand Therapy
- Steroidal injections into the affected joint
- Surgery- Hand Surgeon (surgery is usually the last resort i.e. all above options have been explored.

Hand Therapy:

Hand therapy aims at reducing the pain that you are experiencing when performing any tasks. Daily activities such as dressing, gardening, cooking, PC work and writing can cause severe pain and may lead you to avoid tasks or activities that were once enjoyed.

Arthritis can affect any of the joints in your hand and depending on which joint is painful, this will determine what course of therapy you will require.

Hand therapy assists in reducing any further degeneration of the joint. This is achieved by a custom made splint for your painful joints. This splint allows the affected joint to be rested in a functional position. A functional position is a position that maintains the correct joint alignment and facilitates the use of the hand/joint. As the joint is in the correct position whilst performing tasks, the pain in the joint should reduce.



Thumb splint for base of thumb arthritis



Finger splint for finger joint arthritis

Once the pain has settled, hand therapy will then focus on retraining the muscles surrounding the painful joint and work on improving the alignment of the joint. With time and correct usage of the surrounding musculature, the affected joint should become less swollen and therefore less painful.

Hand therapy also aims at teaching you how to prevent any further damage to the joint when the hand is being used in any daily tasks. This is achieved through joint protective techniques and adaptive equipment. The hand therapist will be able to discuss with you what tasks you are finding painful and either alter the way that you are performing the task, or advise you what equipment you might be able to purchase in order to reduce the pain when performing the tasks.

It should be understood that hand therapy is not able to change the disease pattern, hand therapy rather focuses on slowing the disease progression and preventing any further pain.