

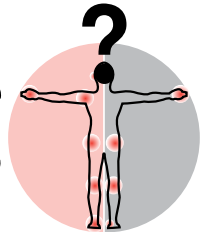
About the author...



Karel Larin

Karel Larin graduated from Montmorency College in 2004 with a diploma in Physical Rehabilitation Therapy (PRT). Because of her interest in the geriatric population, she joined the Vigi Santé organization that same year, working out of the CHSLD Vigi Dollard-des-Ormeaux. Motivated to share her knowledge and improve the quality of life of the residents she serves, Karel has participated in several special projects at Vigi. In addition, Mrs. Larin completed a term of office (2006-2009) as PRT administrator with l'Ordre Professionnel de la Physiothérapie du Québec.

ARTHRITIS OR OSTEOARTHRITIS CAN YOU TELL THE DIFFERENCE?



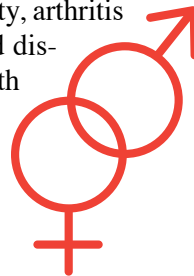
Have you ever felt pain or stiffness in your joints? These aches are generally benign and usually don't last. However, people who suffer from arthritis or osteoarthritis often have to adapt their daily activities because of the symptoms associated with their illness. Quite often, it is possible to reduce the ill effects of the disease and allow the person suffering from such a condition to adapt to their disabilities. We hope this document will help you to better understand the differences between arthritis and osteoarthritis, and provide you with ways to diminish the impact of these conditions on your overall function and quality of life.

WHAT DOES ARTHRITIS MEAN?

The word arthritis refers to the inflammation of a joint or an articulation. Globally, arthritis is divided in two categories: degenerative arthritis (osteoarthritis) and inflammatory arthritis (such as rheumatoid arthritis, ankylosing spondylitis, etc.). In medical jargon "arth" means articulation or joint and "itis" refers to inflammation.

Signs and symptoms of joint inflammation include pain, redness, swelling and stiffness. As for degeneration, it is defined as the partial or total degradation of a structure (tissue, organ, etc.).

There are more than 100 known forms of arthritis. In its totality, arthritis is the most widespread disabling disease in North America, affecting women with both arthritis and osteoarthritis more frequently than men.

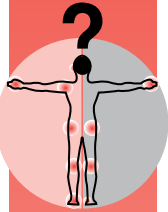


WHAT IS A JOINT COMPOSED OF?

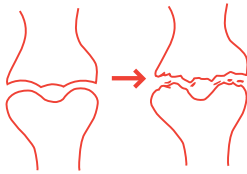
A joint, or articulation, is the junction between two or more bones of the body. One of the roles of the joint is to allow freedom of movement of our body parts. A joint is composed of different materials: cartilage and the synovial membrane being its two main components.

Cartilage is described as a flexible, elastic and resistant tissue which covers and protects bony extremities. Its surface is smooth, ensuring fluidity of movement of the articulation. In a healthy joint the cartilage also acts as a shock absorber, helping to distribute the pressure when the joint bears weight.

The thin layer of tissue which covers the majority of the joints in the human body is known as the synovial membrane. This tissue contains synovial liquid which nourishes the cartilage and lubricates the joints, ensuring their health.



Depending on the type of arthritis, one or many of these elements (bone, cartilage, synovial membrane) may be affected.



WHAT IS DEGENERATIVE ARTHRITIS?

In the case of degenerative arthritis, commonly referred to as osteoarthritis, the joint's cartilage is affected. Its surface becomes rough, which impedes its ability to glide during movement and causes it to wear out and become thin. To compensate for the change in the cartilage, and the loss of its protective coating, the bony surface of the joint thickens. Cracking sounds can be often heard when the roughened joint moves, small fragments of cartilage may become loose and float in the joint, and the thickened bone causes a decrease in joint mobility. Inflammation may then set in resulting in a hot, swollen and painful joint.

When a joint is affected by osteoarthritis it is not considered an inflammatory arthritis because the cause of inflammation is the degradation of the joint itself.

Osteoarthritis may affect any of the joints in our body. However it commonly affects the joints of the hands, particularly the finger tips, as well as the weight bearing joints such as the hips, knees and the spine.

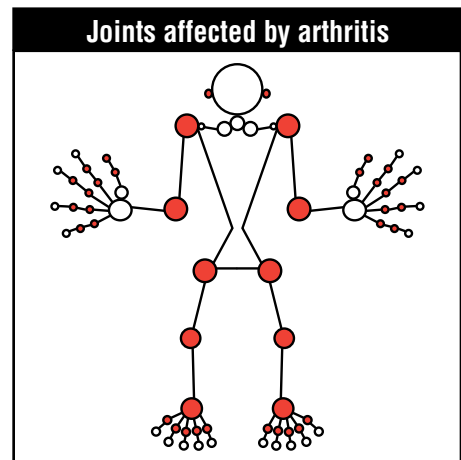
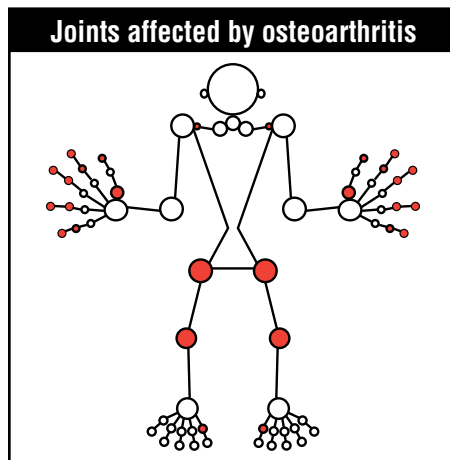
A person suffering from osteoarthritis usually experiences morning stiffness which may last for 15 to 20 minutes. As the day goes on, dis-

comfort, pain and a decrease in functional ability may be noted in the joint if it is overused. On the other hand, if the joint is allowed to rest, the pain decreases and function is restored.

The causes of osteoarthritis are still unknown. However certain factors such as age, heredity, excess weight, past joint injuries and changes caused by other types of arthritis may increase the risk of developing this condition. At present, there is no cure for osteoarthritis. However, research in science and technology continues to seek new treatments and improve existing ones, in an effort to alleviate the symptoms of osteoarthritis and allow those who suffer from it to perform their daily activities optimally.

WHAT IS INFLAMMATORY ARTHRITIS?

Commonly known as arthritis or rheumatoid arthritis (RA), inflammatory arthritis is a disease related to the immune system. For reasons which are currently unknown, the immune system generates antibodies that attack the synovial membrane of the joint, destroying it. This immune reaction results in the well known symptoms of arthritis: joints which are swollen, red, hot and very painful. As the disease progresses, the immune reaction can cause changes in the cartilage and bone of the joint as well, destroying their integrity. In such severe cases the articulation becomes deformed, eventually leading to a complete loss of the joint's function. Arthritis may appear in any of the body's joints, but usually the smaller joints (hands and feet) are the first to be affected.



Arthritis may manifest itself in different ways. Generally, pain and stiffness appear in one joint and, in the weeks and months that follow, other joints become affected. Rheumatoid arthritis is characterized by stiffness in the joints after a period of rest. This stiffness is greater in the morning and may last for a few hours before subsiding. In most cases, normal joint mobility during the course of our daily activities will decrease joint stiffness. Other signs and symptoms which may be noted are fatigue, mild fever, loss of weight, muscular pain, numbness in the fingers, and joint deformity particularly in the hands. There is no cure for arthritis. However, if diagnosed early and treated with the appropriate

medication and interventions, its impact can be controlled. Thus, with the proper care, the person suffering from arthritis can avoid serious joint degeneration and loss of function.



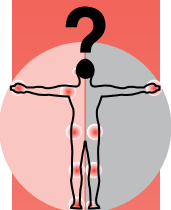
HOW TO BETTER COPE DAILY?

Following are some helpful suggestions on how to cope with either condition in order to optimize your function.

It is very important that you keep moving. Immobilizing the affected joints will only increase their stiffness and you will rapidly lose strength

REFERENCE CHART *(extracted from and Arthritis Society document)*

CHARACTERISTICS	INFLAMMATORY ARTHRITIS	DEGENERATIVE ARTHRITIS
Who gets it?	Inflammatory arthritis can occur at any age, however it usually occurs between the ages of 30 and 60 and tends to become worse with time.	Degenerative arthritis occurs more frequently in an aged population and usually affects the most commonly used joints.
What is the cause?	A sickness said to be “auto-immune” in nature.	Cartilage deterioration resulting from wear and tear.
How does the condition present itself?	It may begin in one joint, but shows up rapidly in other joints within a variable time period: from a few weeks to a few months.	The condition is manifested gradually and becomes worse over a lengthier period, taking months to years to culminate.
How many joints can be affected?	It generally affects many joints simultaneously and tends to be symmetrical (both sides of the body are affected).	Generally, a few joints are affected and the condition is asymmetrical in its presentation. (irregular, on one side of the body).
Which joints are usually affected?	The smaller joints of the hands and feet, the wrists, elbows, shoulders, knees and hips may be affected, as well as any other joint in the body.	The joints which are most commonly used and are therefore subject to a greater amount of wear and tear are affected. For example the joints of the hands and the weight bearing joints such as the hips and knees.
What are the usual symptoms?	Pain, swelling, sensitivity and redness of the affected joints. Prolonged morning stiffness and limited mobility upon awakening. Fever, loss of weight, fatigue and possibly anemia.	When over used, the affected joints may become stiff, painful and swollen.
Is there morning stiffness?	Yes, for more than 60 minutes	Yes, for more than 20 minutes
Are there specific examples of this disease?	Polymyalgia rheumatica, psoriatic arthritis, ankylosing spondylitis (affects the spine), systemic lupus erythematosus.	Osteoarthritis
What are the treatment options?	Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAID), slow acting antirheumatic drugs, corticosteroid medication, biological treatments, corticoid shots.	Pain killers, NSAID, injections: corticoids and viscosupplementation.



and mobility in those joints. Of course, it is important not to wear yourself out, but to perform your daily activities and exercises based on your level of tolerance without increasing your pain. Accordingly, when suffering from a severe bout of arthritis you need to rest, however activity should be resumed as soon as possible.

For pain relief, it is recommended to apply ice during the acute phase of the condition, and heat once it becomes chronic. The application of ice or heat directly to the joint can help relieve pain after exercising. Heat can also be applied to relax the muscles surrounding the affected joint before exercising. At the CHSLD, the responsible health professionals (doctors, nursing staff, physiotherapy staff, etc.) can help you decide which treatment is appropriate for your condition. In any case, the use of a “magic bag” or of an electric heating pad will be discouraged in order to avoid the risk of burns.

In addition, the following advice may be beneficial: Using a body pillow to improve your position when lying in bed. Performing stretching exercises when rising in the morning. Using a cane or a walker when walking in order to decrease weight bearing on a painful leg.

In your daily life, the use of adapted equipment and compensatory techniques can also be helpful in nurturing independence and in decreasing pain. For example, using a spoon with a large handle to compensate for a limited hand grasp, or installing a cushion on a chair, or a wooden base under an armchair, to raise the seat’s height and improve the ease of transfers, are methods used to maintain independence and ensure safety.

AT THE CHSLD AN INTERDISCIPLINARY TEAM IS HERE TO HELP YOU!

At the Vigi Santé CHSLD, an interdisciplinary team will assist you in maintaining an optimal level of health and function. In fact, these professionals will address your specific needs in order to ensure that quality of life is preserved. This team is usually comprised of a doctor, a pharmacist, a nurse, physiotherapy staff, an occupational therapist, a psychologist, a social worker, a dietician, a recreologist, etc. These professionals may not be able to heal your disease but they will assist you in adapting and compensating to the changes and challenges that you are faced with.

Thus, well surrounded by an interdisciplinary team that will stand by you for better or worse, that will assist you, guide you and encourage you in your moment of need, whether you are suffering from arthritis or osteoarthritis, you may continue to be active and enjoy life in spite of the inconveniences related to your condition.

Do not hesitate to talk to your doctor or to any other health professional should you have questions concerning your medical condition. You should also consult a medical professional before starting an exercise program. He or she will be able to inform you of the precautions to take and of any contraindications related to your condition.

Some information put forward in this pamphlet is inspired from documentation offered by the *Arthritis Society – Quebec chapter*. www.arthritis.ca

The series of documents “*Between you & I*” are published by a group of Residents’ Committees from various Vigi Santé residential and long-term care centers (CHSLD). Former issues are available at www.vigisante.com.

Information: Marc Turgeon, Residents’ Counselor



Vigi Santé Ltée
197, Thornhill, Dollard-des-Ormeaux (Québec) H9B 3H8
Telephone: 514 684-0930 • Fax: 514 684-0179 • email: mturgeon@vigisante.com



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The masculine gender is used in this document without discrimination of the feminine solely for legibility.