

Polyarthritis

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Polyarthritis is joint pain that affects five or more joints. Joints that are inflamed are often red, warm, and swollen. Risk factors include old age, sex (more common in females), and genetics. Risk factors you can change include being overweight, infections, and trauma. Many different conditions can cause polyarthritis. These conditions are grouped into acute (symptoms lasting <6 weeks) or chronic (symptoms lasting >6 weeks). To make a diagnosis, your doctor will want to know when your symptoms started, what joints are involved, how many joints are involved, whether one or both sides of body are affected, and whether inflammation is present.

FEW COMMON CONDITIONS

CAUSING POLYARTHRITIS:

- **Osteoarthritis (OA):** most common type of arthritis. Involves the breakdown of cartilage, which is located between joints. Weight-bearing joints, such as hip and knee, are most commonly affected. OA is a chronic form of arthritis. Both sides may be affected, but symptoms may be worse on one side more than the other.
- **Infectious arthritis:** caused by a virus (such as Parvovirus or HIV) or bacteria (such as Gonorrhea). Presents acutely with inflamed joints. Joints involved and symmetry of involvement vary with the type of infection. May also present with a fever.
- **Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA):** a type of arthritis where your own body is attacking the joints. It is a chronic condition and involves symmetrical inflammation of small and large joints. Typically will affect joints in hands, wrists and knees.
- **Systemic Lupus Erythematosus (SLE):** chronic disorder that causes inflammation throughout the entire body, affecting joints and organs. Involves inflammation of small joints of hands, wrists, and knees in a symmetrical fashion.
- **Ankylosing Arthritis:** chronic condition that involves inflammation of spine and large joints, such as the hip, in a symmetrical fashion. More common in men.
- **Psoriatic Arthritis:** seen in individuals with psoriasis, a chronic disorder that attacks the skin and joints. Causes symmetrical inflammation of both small and large joints.

MEDICAL TREATMENT & OPTIONS:

You should see your Osteopathic Family Physician if you experience joint pain or swelling. Treatment for arthritis is targeted to decrease pain and damage to joints. Treatment choices include:

Medications

- **Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory (NSAIDs):** These drugs decrease pain and inflammation
- **Corticosteroids:** These suppress the immune system to help decrease inflammation. These can either be given orally or by injection directly to affected joint.
- **Disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARDs):** These also suppress the immune system. Often used to treat rheumatoid arthritis.
- **Analgesics:** These medications, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol®), are available over-the-counter and will help to reduce pain.
- **Antibiotics:** Used for infectious arthritis caused by bacteria. If the joint is infected by a virus, antibiotics will not be helpful. Arthritis caused by a virus typically will resolve on its own.

Non-pharmacological intervention

- Physical therapy can help strengthen joints and increase range of motion.
- Low impact exercise can help, such as walking, biking, or swimming.
- Hot or cold packs can provide pain relief. See which one works best for you, or alternate.

Should conservative management fail, your doctor may discuss surgical options with you.

SOURCE(S): American College of Rheumatology

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