

**Osteoarthritis (OA) is a common condition affecting joints, most likely the weight-bearing joints. When OA occurs at the joint the cartilage becomes thin and the joint space becomes narrower. This means there is less space between the bones for movement.**

The knee joint is where your thigh bone (femur) meets your shin bone (tibia). The ends of the bones are covered in cartilage. This reduces friction and allows the joint to move freely.

## What are the symptoms?

You may experience some or all of the following symptoms:

- pain
- stiffness and reduced range of movement
- swelling
- muscle weakness
- decreased mobility when walking

## How common is it?

Many things may play a role in the OA developing:

- Age. OA becomes more common with age.
- Genetics. There is some evidence that OA runs in families.
- Sex. Women are more likely to develop OA than men.
- Previous joint injury, damage or deformity. For example, this may include previous joint infection, a previous fracture (break in the bone) around a joint, or a previous ligament injury that caused a joint to become unstable.
- Obesity. Knee and hip OA are more likely to develop, or be more severe, in overweight people. This is because there is an increased load on the joints and a potential for more joint damage.
- Occupational overuse of a joint.

## What tests can be done

If you see a healthcare professional they will ask you questions and carry out a clinical examination to help establish the cause of your problem.

An X-ray can be a useful test to confirm osteoarthritis, however, it does not always tell us the amount of symptoms you have.

## What are the treatment options?

There are a number of treatment options you can try that may help:

- medication
- use of heat or ice for pain relief
- using a stick may help reduce the pressure through your knee
- wearing supportive footwear
- losing weight
- general exercise, for example walking or swimming (not breaststroke)

You can find more [information about treating muscle, bone and joint problems](#) in the NHS inform Musculoskeletal (MSK) Zone.

## Exercises to strengthen your knee or to increase or maintain your range of movement in the joint

You can find some [simple exercise to get you started](#) in the MSK Zone on NHS inform.

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## Further information

If you have a muscle, bone or joint problem, visit the [MSK Zone](#) on NHS inform for self-management advice and exercises to get you moving normally, and safely.