

develop over such a long time that they are hardly noticed. For others, problems may worsen over a number of months or years. When the overall disease process finishes, joints may look knobby, but are usually less painful. In some cases they become pain free and, despite their appearance, still enable you to carry out most everyday tasks.

Osteoarthritis used to be considered wear and tear arthritis, but it is now understood that there are many more factors than age and use that contribute to the development of osteoarthritis – including obesity, past injury and genetics.

### (c) Gout

Gout is the most common inflammatory arthritis among men resulting from a process caused by an overproduction or under excretion of uric acid. When there is too much uric acid in the tissues, it can form crystals. These crystals can form in and around joints leading to inflammation, swelling – and severe pain. Certain common medications, alcohol, and dietary foods are known to be contributory factors.

### WHO GETS ARTHRITIS?

ARTHRITIS affects people of all ages children can develop arthritis. It is true that some types of arthritis e.g. osteoarthritis, are more common in older people. However, there are other kinds arthritis common to both young men and women. There are some forms of arthritis that are more common in women (e.g. rheumatoid arthritis) whilst other are more common in men (e.g. gout).

Arthritic can affect anyone. Some types of arthritis occur even when there is no family member with arthritis, and there are other forms that occur more often in family members of patients with arthritis.

### WHAT CAN BE DONE TO TREAT ARTHRITIS?

The treatment of ARTHRITIS will depend on the cause of the arthritis and may include:

#### a) General Measures

- Reducing weight, doing exercises to strengthen muscles and avoiding alcohol and certain foods (e.g. for management of gout)
- Using a splint, brace, knee or ankle guard, walking stick, crutches and other assistive devices helps some patients, depending on which joints are involved and the severity of the joint damage.

#### b) Medication

- Analgesics or pain tablets can be used to provide pain relief.
- Anti-inflammatory drugs for reducing pain, stiffness and swelling of joints.
- Disease modifying drugs to prevent repeated episodes of pain and swelling of the joints. These can be used for certain types of arthritis like rheumatoid arthritis.
- For cases where cause of arthritis is known like gout specific treatment can be used.

#### c) Surgery

Where a patient manifests severe damage to a joint surgery maybe performed to relieve the pain and improve quality of life or prevent further damage to a joint.

### WHAT CAN YOU DO IF YOU THINK YOU HAVE ARTHRITIS?

FIRST determine whether your symptoms are due to ARTHRITIS or RHEUMATISM. You should visit your nearest primary health care centre, clinic, family doctor or hospital for the necessary diagnostic tests and findings

Depending of the findings on examination, you will be advised what you should do and may also be given some medication. If the doctor finds your illness more severe than expected you may require further tests and or x-rays and you may be referred to a hospital or specialist for further assessment and management.

**\*\*\* For detailed information on arthritis treatment and management or medical attention consult us on 0722 935706.**

# NAIROBI ARTHRITIS CLINIC

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## ARTHRITIS DEMYSTIFIED



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## WHAT IS ARTHRITIS?

Most of us will experience pain in or around a joint at sometime. The pain is often due to some minor injury, sprain or overuse of a joint and usually lasts from a few hours to a few days and then settles completely. While the word ARTHRITIS is used by clinicians to specifically mean joint inflammation, in public health it refers to rheumatic diseases and conditions that affect joints, the tissues which surround the joint and other connective tissue. The pattern, severity and location of symptoms can vary depending on the specific form of the disease. Typically, rheumatic conditions are characterized by pain and stiffness in or around one or more joints. The symptoms can develop gradually or suddenly and certain rheumatic conditions can also involve the immune system and various internal organs of the body.

**RHEUMATISM** is a general term which is used to describe aches and pains in or around a joint. It may be due to some abnormality in the tissue around the joint such as the muscles, tendons and ligaments.

**ARTHRITIS** means inflammation of the joints. In many patients (e.g. rheumatoid arthritis) there is marked inflammation of the joints with pain, swelling and limitation of movement. Some patients have damage in the joint with pain and limitation of movement but there is little or no swelling of the joint (e.g. osteoarthritis).

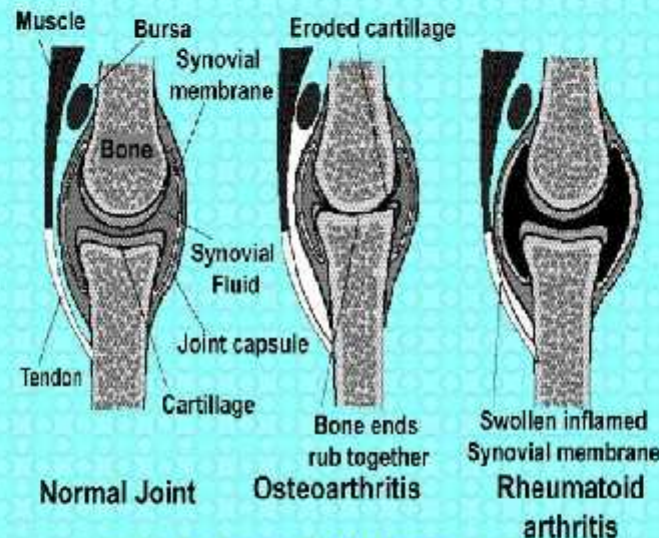
### HOW DO JOINTS WORK?

A **JOINT** is a part of the body where one bone moves on another bone. The two bones are held together by ligaments. **LIGAMENTS** are like elastic bands they keep the bones in place while muscles lengthen and shorten to make the joint move.

At the end of the bones there is a layer of **CARTILAGE** which covers the surface of the bone. The cartilage is present inside the joint. It prevents the bones from directly rubbing against each other and acts as a shock absorber. As a result the joint is able to work smoothly.

The space within the joint is the **JOINT CAVITY** which contains **SYNOVIAL FLUID**. The lining of the joint cavity is called **SYNOVIUM**, which produces the **SYNOVIAL FLUID**. This fluid lubricates the joint and provides nutrients to the joint and the cartilage. The outer layer of the joint is called the **CAPSULE**.

Around the joints we have **MUSCLES**. The ends of the muscles become smaller and form **TENDONS** which are the part of the muscles inserted into the bone.



### NORMAL and ARTHRITIC JOINTS

Movement of a joint takes place when the muscle contracts and pulls on the tendon and moves the two bones towards or away from each other.

### ARE THERE DIFFERENT TYPES OF ARTHRITIS?

There are many different type **ARTHRITIS**. There are over one hundred different diseases which can cause arthritis. In some patients, the cause of the arthritis is known (e.g. gout or arthritis associated with infection) and we are able to treat the arthritis with specific treatment.

In other cases the cause of the arthritis is not known (e.g. rheumatoid arthritis or osteoarthritis). As a result it is not possible to cure the disease but possible to control the disease and prevent slow down damage to the joints. Some types of arthritis include:

#### (a) Rheumatoid arthritis

This is the most common inflammatory of the types of arthritis and causes premature mortality, disability and compromised quality of life in the industrialized and developing world. It is a systemic inflammatory disease which manifests itself in multiple joints of the body. The inflammatory process primarily affects the lining of the joints (synovial membrane), but can also affect other organs. The inflamed synovium leads to erosions of the cartilage and bone and sometimes joint deformity. Pain, swelling, and redness are common joint manifestations.

In most diseases, inflammation serves a purpose – it helps healing and, when healing is done, the inflammation goes away. The body's natural defences (the immune system) are part of the problem in rheumatoid arthritis and the opposite occurs. Instead of protecting certain body parts, the immune system somehow puts itself into reverse and attacks these body parts. This auto-immune reaction occurs mainly in the joints, but in a flare-up (when the inflammation is active) other organs can be affected. Rheumatoid arthritis inflammation causes damage which can go on for a longtime, or come and go. When it is active (known as a flare-up) you may feel unwell. The exact cause of this immune system reaction is unknown to date.

#### (b) Osteoarthritis

Osteoarthritis is a disease of the entire joint involving the cartilage, joint lining, ligaments, and underlying bone. The breakdown of these tissues eventually leads to pain and joint stiffness. The joints most commonly affected are the knees, hips, and those in the hands and spine.

For some people the symptoms of osteoarthritis are so subtle and