

WORLD AUTOIMMUNE ARTHRITIS DAY

Understand. Act Early. Live Well.

Arthritis is a general term used to describe inflammation, pain, stiffness, or degeneration affecting the joints. According to the CDC, arthritis affects millions of adults in the U.S. and is a leading cause of disability.

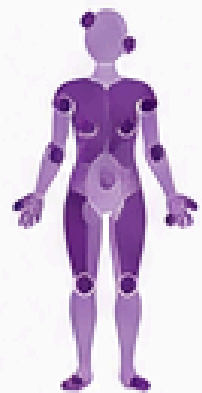


There are more than 100 types of arthritis. The two most common are: **AUTOIMMUNE ARTHRITIS** and **OSTEOARTHRITIS** (wear-and-tear arthritis)



WHAT IS AUTOIMMUNE ARTHRITIS?

Occurs when the immune system mistakenly attacks healthy joint tissues, causing inflammation that can damage joints and other organs.



Common Types Include:

- Rheumatoid arthritis (RA)
- Psoriatic arthritis
- Ankylosing spondylitis
- Juvenile idiopathic arthritis
- Lupus-related arthritis

Rheumatoid arthritis often affects joints symmetrically—both sides of the body, such as both hands or both knees.



A systemic disease: inflammation can also affect the lungs, eyes, skin, blood vessels, and heart.

Common Symptoms:

- ✓ Joint swelling
- ✓ Warm or tender joints
- ✓ Morning stiffness lasting longer than 30 minutes
- ✓ Fatigue
- ✓ Fever or flu-like symptoms
- ✓ Flare-ups that come and go
- ✓ Joint pain affecting multiple joints at once



WHAT IS WEAR-AND-TEAR ARTHRITIS?

Also called osteoarthritis. Occurs when the protective cartilage cushioning the joints breaks down over time. Bones then rub together, causing pain, stiffness, swelling, and reduced movement.

Most Commonly Affects:

- ✓ Knees
- ✓ Hips
- ✓ Hands
- ✓ Spine & Neck

Common Symptoms:

- ✓ Joint pain that worsens with activity
- ✓ Stiffness after inactivity
- ✓ Reduced flexibility
- ✓ Grinding or popping sensations
- ✓ Swelling around affected joints
- ✓ Pain usually limited to specific joints



HOW ARE THEY DIFFERENT?

AUTOIMMUNE ARTHRITIS

- Caused by immune system dysfunction
- 🔥 Inflammatory disease
- 👤 Can affect organs and the entire body
- 🕒 Often includes fatigue and prolonged morning stiffness
- ⚡ Symptoms may flare unpredictably
- 👤 Can occur at younger ages

VS.

One key distinction is inflammation.

Autoimmune arthritis is driven by immune-mediated inflammation, while osteoarthritis is primarily caused by mechanical wear and joint degeneration, though some inflammation can occur.

OSTEOARTHRITIS

- Caused by cartilage breakdown over time
- 👤 Degenerative joint disease
- 👤 Primarily affects joints only
- 🕒 Symptoms worsen gradually
- 👤 More closely associated with aging and joint overuse
- 👤 Often affects weight-bearing joints

WHICH TYPE IS MORE COMMON?



Osteoarthritis is by far the most common form of arthritis worldwide—millions of adults are affected, especially older adults.



Autoimmune arthritis conditions are less common but can be more severe.



Rheumatoid arthritis alone affects an estimated 18 million people worldwide.

Autoimmune arthritis can lead to progressive joint damage and systemic complication if left untreated.

RISK FACTORS

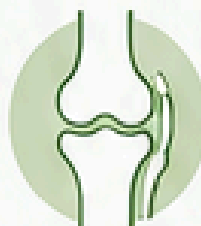
Autoimmune Arthritis Risk Factors

- More common in women
- Family history
- Smoking
- Obesity
- Hormonal influences
- Environmental exposure
- Infection



Osteoarthritis Risk Factors

- Aging
- Joint injury
- Repetitive joint stress
- Obesity
- Genetics
- Weak muscles around the joints



PREVENTION STRATEGIES



Maintain a Healthy Weight: Reduces pressure on joints and inflammation. Even modest weight loss helps protect knees and hips.



Stay Physically Active: Strengthens muscles, improves flexibility, and reduces stiffness. Try walking, swimming, cycling, yoga, and stretching.



Avoid Smoking: Strongly linked to rheumatoid arthritis and may worsen disease severity.



Protect Your Joints: Use proper lifting techniques, improve ergonomics, and avoid repetitive joint stress.



Eat an Anti-Inflammatory Diet: Choose fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, fish (omega-3s), nuts and seeds to help lower inflammation.

TREATMENT OPTIONS

AUTOIMMUNE ARTHRITIS

Focuses on reducing inflammation, slowing joint damage, and controlling immune activity.



NSAIDs



Corticosteroids



DMARDs



Biologic Medications



Physical Therapy

Biologic therapies target specific immune pathways. Untreated autoimmune arthritis can lead to permanent joint damage and disability. Early treatment improves long-term outcomes.

OSTEOARTHRITIS

Focuses on pain management, mobility preservation, and joint protection.



Exercise & Physical Therapy



Weight Management



NSAIDs or Topical Pain Relievers



Steroid Injections



Joint Replacement Surgery

Strengthening muscles around joints improves stability and reduces pain.

ARTHRITIS AND HIGH-ALTITUDE LIVING

Considerations for Mountain Communities (like Big Bear)



Cold Temperatures & Weather Changes

Many people report worsening symptoms during colder weather or rapid weather shifts. Changes in barometric pressure may affect joint tissues and pain sensitivity.



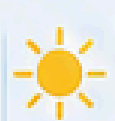
Increased Stiffness in Winter

Cold weather may cause muscle tightening and less activity, increasing stiffness and discomfort. Stay active indoors to maintain flexibility and circulation.



Reduced Oxygen at High Altitudes

Lower oxygen levels may cause increased fatigue or shortness of breath in some people with lung or heart involvement. Talk to your doctor before high-altitude exercise or travel.



Increased UV Exposure

UV radiation is stronger at higher elevations. Autoimmune conditions (like lupus-related arthritis) can worsen with excess sun. Use sunscreen, wear hats/sunglasses, UV-protective clothing, and limit midday sun.



Benefits of Mountain Living

Access to outdoor recreation, walking trails, and active living can improve joint mobility, muscle strength, mental health, and overall fitness. Regular movement—done safely—supports long-term joint health.



WHEN TO SEEK MEDICAL CARE

See a healthcare provider if you experience:

- Persistent joint swelling
- Morning stiffness
- Ongoing joint pain
- Fatigue
- Reduced mobility
- Symptoms lasting more than several weeks

Early diagnosis can prevent long-term joint damage and improve quality of life.



RAISING AWARENESS ON WORLD AUTOIMMUNE ARTHRITIS DAY

Not all arthritis is a normal part of aging. While osteoarthritis is more common, autoimmune arthritis can be life-altering without proper treatment. Awareness, early intervention, healthy habits, and ongoing care help people stay active and live better—at any age and any altitude.

REFERENCES & RESOURCES

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – Arthritis Overview www.cdc.gov/arthritis
- CDC – Rheumatoid Arthritis www.cdc.gov/arthritis/rheumatoid-arthritis
- CDC – Osteoarthritis www.cdc.gov/arthritis/basics/osteoarthritis



National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases (NIAMS) www.niams.nih.gov



World Health Organization – Rheumatoid Arthritis Fact Sheet www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/rheumatoid-arthritis



Arthritis Foundation www.arthritis.org