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**WESTERN CAPE
ASSOCIATION FOR
PERSONS WITH
DISABILITIES**

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adding
value
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Focus on...

What is arthritis?

Arthritis is a chronic disease, mainly characterised by inflammation of the lining, or synovium, of the joints. It can lead to long-term joint damage, resulting in chronic pain, loss of function and disability. There are many types of arthritis (over 100 and growing). The types range from those related to wear and tear of cartilage (such as osteoarthritis) to those associated with inflammation resulting from an overactive immune system (such as rheumatoid arthritis). Together, the many types of arthritis make up the most common chronic illness in the United States.

What causes arthritis?

The causes of arthritis depend on the form of arthritis. Causes include injury (leading to osteoarthritis), metabolic abnormalities (such as gout and pseudogout), hereditary factors, infections, and unclear reasons (such as rheumatoid arthritis and systemic lupus erythematosus). Arthritis is classified as one of the rheumatic diseases. These are conditions that are different individual illnesses, with differing features, treatments, complications, and prognoses. They are similar in that they have a tendency to affect the joints, muscles, ligaments, cartilage, and tendons, and many have the potential to affect other internal body areas.

What are symptoms of arthritis?

Symptoms of arthritis include pain and limited function of joints. Inflammation of the joints from arthritis is characterized by joint stiffness, swelling, redness, and warmth. Tenderness of the inflamed joint can be present. Many of the forms of arthritis, because they are rheumatic diseases, can cause symptoms affecting various organs of the body that do not directly involve the joints. Therefore, symptoms in some patients with certain forms of arthritis can also include fever, gland swelling (lymph node), weight loss, fatigue, feeling unwell, and even symptoms from abnormalities of organs such as the lungs, heart, or kidneys.

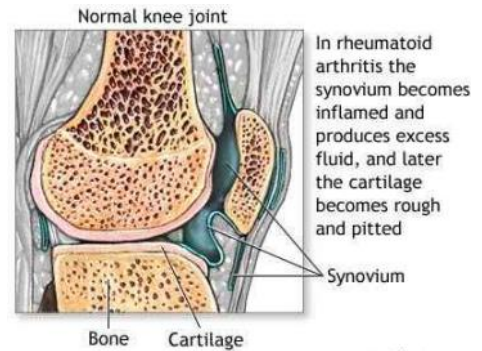
What is the prevalence of arthritis?

Arthritis, which literally means "inflammation of a joint", is the number one disabling disease in South Africa, affecting an estimated one in every seven people. Arthritis is not infectious but can be inherited from one generation to the next through genes. Osteoarthritis (OA) is the commonest joint disease and its prevalence increases with age so that more than 50 percent of older people over 65-years of age have clinical evidence of OA. Worldwide, OA affects approximately 40 million people. Arthritis sufferers include men and women, children and adults. Approximately 350 million people worldwide have arthritis. Nearly 40 million people in the United States are affected by arthritis, including over a quarter million children!

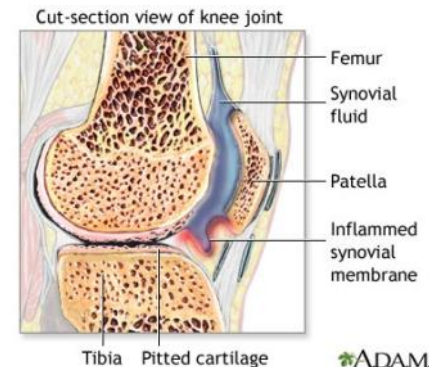
Types of arthritis

The general term, arthritis actually includes more than a hundred related but distinct diseases. *Osteoarthritis*, which means the wearing down of the surface of a joint, is a 'local disease' which is

Arthritis



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confined to a few specific joints in the body. The cartilage 'cushion' deteriorates resulting in pain and loss of movement as bone rubs against bone, and the bones underneath becoming rough. The joint normally heals itself but in very few cases results in severe damage and deformity.

On the other hand *Rheumatoid arthritis*, found in about six percent of all reported cases, can affect the entire body resulting in general fatigue and formation of lumps under the skin called "rheumatoid nodules". This kind of arthritis afflicts three times more women than men and can make a person ill. Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) progresses in three stages. The first stage is the swelling of the synovial lining, causing pain, warmth, stiffness, redness and swelling around the joint. Second is the rapid division and growth of cells, or pannus, which causes the synovium to thicken. In the third stage, the inflamed cells release enzymes that may digest bone and cartilage, often causing the involved joint to lose its shape and alignment, more pain, and loss of movement.

Gout and *fibromyalgia* are also forms of arthritis.

How is arthritis treated?

The treatment of arthritis is very dependent on the precise type of arthritis present. An accurate diagnosis increases the chances for successful treatment. Treatments available include physical therapy, splinting, cold pack application, paraffin wax dips, antiinflammation medications, immune-altering medications, and surgical operations. Arthritis can be managed through a range of treatments from keeping a balance between rest and exercise, the gentle use of the afflicted joint, drug therapy, mainly for relief of pain and to increase mobility.