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SECTION ON GERIATRICS

# OSTEOARTHRITIS

*This brochure was developed through a coordinated project with the Section on Geriatrics of the American Physical Therapy Association. Student physical therapists and student physical therapist assistants were invited to create educational brochures for the Section's consumer focus.*

*The Section on Geriatrics applauds the efforts of:*

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# OSTEOARTHRITIS

## WHAT IS IT?

Osteoarthritis **OA** or degenerative joint disease, is one of the oldest and most common types of arthritis that affects the hands and weight-bearing joints such as the hips or knees. **OA** is caused by the breakdown of a joint's **cartilage**, which is the cushion-like material on the ends of bones at joints. Loss of this cushioning causes bones to rub together, which causes pain, inflammation, and loss of movement.

## WHAT CAUSES IT?

Many factors contribute to the development of **OA**. Although **age** is one of the biggest risk factors, research has shown that **OA** is not an inevitable part of aging. Some other factors that contribute to the development of **OA** are:

- **Obesity** may lead to **OA** in weight-bearing joints such as the knees, hips, feet, or back.
- Persons with joint injuries due to sports, work-related activity, or accidents, are at a higher risk of developing **OA**.
- **Genetics** can also play a role in the development of **OA**, causing potential bony defects, particularly in the hands.

## WHO GETS IT?

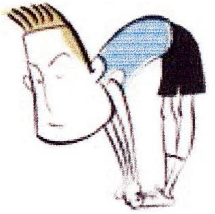
Along with the factors listed above, the following are potentially at risk for the development of **OA**:

- **OA** most commonly affects middle aged people and the elderly.
- Persons with a history of joint complications, such as deformities, defects, or injuries, are at risk for the onset of **OA**.
- **Women** are more commonly affected by **OA**, as opposed to men.
- Persons with weight problems are at higher risk for developing **OA**.

## WHAT ARE SOME TREATMENT OPTIONS?

Treatment of **OA** focuses on the decreasing of pain and the improvement of joint function and movement. Treatment may include but is not limited to:

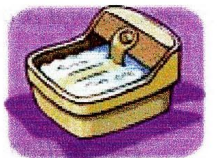
- Exercises to keep joints flexible and improve muscle stretch



- Weight control and exercise to prevent extra stress or strain on weight-bearing joints.



- Heat/cold therapy for temporary pain relief.



- Many forms of medication for inflammation and chronic pain.



- In some cases surgery is necessary to relieve chronic pain.



## OTHER INFORMATION:

- **OA** affects over 20 million Americans.
- 80% of people with **OA** report limitation of movement or activity.
- As many as 1/2 of the people affected by **OA** cannot make informed decisions about care.