Take Control of Your Osteoarthritis
Osteoarthritis can make it difficult to enjoy life. When it’s painful to move your joint, simple tasks like cooking dinner, walking the dog, or working in the garden become daily challenges.

Living with osteoarthritis isn’t about accepting limitations. It’s about taking control.

Did you know that making healthy changes, like losing weight or exercising, can help you manage the symptoms of osteoarthritis? Or that people in the early stages of osteoarthritis can take steps to slow the development of the disease?

It’s simple: when you know how to manage your osteoarthritis and put that knowledge into action, you’re less likely to live in pain and discomfort.

The first step is to take responsibility for managing your osteoarthritis. Talk to your family doctor and other health providers about how you can take control. But first, read this brochure. It’s a great place to get started.
About Osteoarthritis

Osteoarthritis is a disease that results when cartilage in your joint breaks down. Cartilage is the hard, white tissue that caps the ends of your bones. You can see it when you tear a drumstick off of a chicken. It’s a shock absorber for your joint. When you move, it cushions the impact and lets your bones glide smoothly over each other.

As osteoarthritis develops, the cartilage begins to fray and may even wear away entirely, causing your bones to rub directly against each other. This can make it painful to move your joint. In some cases, little bumpy growths, or spurs, develop on the ends of the bone.

Osteoarthritis can develop in any joint. It usually affects the joints that carry your bodyweight, like the lower back, feet, hips, and knees. It is also seen in finger joints and the joint at the base of the thumb.
Did You Know?

- There are over 100 kinds of arthritis. Osteoarthritis is the most common

- Osteoarthritis affects one in ten Canadians

- Almost all Canadians will have symptoms of osteoarthritis in at least one joint by the age of 65

- Osteoarthritis affects women and men almost equally

- Osteoarthritis is a leading cause of long-term disability

- The economic cost of arthritis in general is $4.4 billion a year. It’s the second most costly category of diseases in Canada after cardiovascular diseases.

- Osteoarthritis has been around for thousands of years. Dinosaur bones and ice-age skeletons show evidence of the disease!
Signs & Symptoms

Here are some early signs of osteoarthritis. Talk to your doctor if you have any of these symptoms:

➤ A continuous achy feeling in your joint
➤ Pain when you put weight on your joint
➤ Pain in your joint when walking, climbing stairs, sitting down, or getting up out of a chair
➤ Stiffness, swelling, or a loss of flexibility in your joint
➤ Stiffness in your joint for more than half an hour after you get out of bed in the morning.

Causes

The simple fact is: we don’t know what causes osteoarthritis. We do know that these risk factors can increase your chances of developing the disease:

➤ **Age:** Osteoarthritis is not a result of aging, but your chances of developing the disease go up as you get older.

➤ **Weight:** Excess weight can strain the joints that carry your body weight, like hips and knees.

➤ **Other types of arthritis:** Other joint diseases, like rheumatoid arthritis, can damage joints and lead to osteoarthritis.

➤ **Heredity:** If you have a family history of osteoarthritis you may be more likely to develop the disease.

➤ **Injury and overuse:** Old injuries and repetitive activities — like heavy lifting, kneeling, or squatting — can leave lasting damage in your joints.
Take Control

Taking control of your osteoarthritis means caring for more than just your joints. It means eating well, exercising, and learning how you can continue to enjoy everyday life.

It’s not just about getting active.
It’s about getting actively involved in managing your osteoarthritis.

If you think you have osteoarthritis, the first thing you need to do is talk to your family doctor. Only your doctor can diagnose your joint pain. Your doctor will discuss your self-management goals and the different ways – like diet and exercise – that you can begin to take control of your osteoarthritis. Always talk to your doctor before starting a new exercise program. Your medical history may determine which exercises you can and cannot do.

Keep reading to learn how you can get actively involved.
Exercise

Exercise will keep your cartilage nourished, your muscles strong, and your joints flexible.

Talk to your physiotherapist or doctor about which exercises are right for you.

Here are some general tips:

» Keep your exercises short and easy to begin with. When you get stronger, your exercises can get harder.

» Choose activities that will make your muscles stronger, stretch your joints, and build your endurance. For example:

- **Range of motion or flexibility exercises** relieve stiffness and keep your joints moving. Try stretching or gentle yoga.

- **Strength exercises** build muscle. Try exercises with weights or stretchy bands. Water exercises are also good.

- **Low-impact aerobic exercises** build endurance. Try swimming, walking, water aerobics, or the stationary bike.

» Stop before you exercise too much. If your joint is sore for more than 2 hours after exercising you may have pushed yourself too hard. Try exercising for a shorter period of time, taking breaks, or finding a new activity.
Take Care of your Joints

➤ Avoid doing the same task over and over or spending a long time in the same position. Take many breaks and alternate activities.

➤ Use helping aids like a cane, grocery cart, or reaching aid to take some of the stress off your joints.

➤ Use grab bars and shower seats in bathrooms to avoid falls.

➤ Apply moist heat to sore joints and muscles for 20 minutes up to 3 times a day. This helps to increase blood flow and relax stiff muscles. Do not apply heat to a swollen joint or over skin that is numb.

➤ Wrap ice packs in a towel and apply to swollen joints for 15 minutes to reduce pain and swelling. You can apply ice every hour if your joint is very swollen. Do not apply ice over skin that is numb. You will not be able to feel the cold and may overdo it.

➤ Sleep well to keep energy levels high and give your joints a much-needed rest. Get the amount of sleep that’s right for you. Try to go to bed and wake up at the same time every day.
Watch Your Weight

When you’re overweight every extra pound puts 4 to 6 times more force on your hip and knee joints. If you are carrying an extra 20 pounds, you are putting 80 – 120 times more force on your joints. If you have osteoarthritis, weight loss may relieve your pain and help you move your joints more easily.

➤ **Eat breakfast.** 8 out of 10 people who are overweight don’t eat breakfast. It tells your body to wake up and boosts your metabolism.

➤ **Savour your food.** Take at least 20 minutes to eat a meal and chew slowly to give your body time to let you know when you are full.

➤ **Eat smaller meals more often** so you can burn calories between meals. If you eat too much at one time, your body will store the extra calories as fat.

➤ **Do not eat for 2 to 3 hours before going to sleep.** If you eat a large meal or snack non-stop before going to bed, your body may not have a chance to burn calories.

➤ **Drink low calorie fluids** like water, herbal teas, flavoured waters, and vegetable juices. Aim for 8 glasses or 2 litres a day.

➤ **Eat your vegetables.** Vegetables are low in calories and full of nutrients. Eat as many as you want, but go easy on dips and sauces.

➤ **Tell your friends and family** that you are trying to lose weight and you need their support. Their help can make a huge difference!
Eat Well

Eating a balanced diet that follows Canada’s Food Guide will help you stay healthy. Your diet should be low in fat, high in fibre and filled with fruits, vegetables, and good sources of calcium. Make sure to meet your daily needs for all nutrients. Read Canada’s Food Guide to learn more.

Make sure to get enough Vitamin C and D. Getting your daily needs of these vitamins may slow the progress of osteoarthritis.

Don’t Ignore Your Emotional Health

It is natural to be sad or depressed after you are diagnosed with a chronic condition like osteoarthritis. Many people feel alone, isolated or helpless. Talk to your doctor if you have any of the symptoms of depression.
Take Medicines Wisely

Do not try to control your pain through medicine alone. Medicine works best when you also manage your pain through lifestyle changes like eating well and exercising regularly. Always discuss possible side-effects with your doctor.

Find Out if Surgery is Right for You

Some people think that surgery is the only treatment for osteoarthritis. But surgery isn’t right for everyone. Some people will be able to avoid or put off surgery by making positive lifestyle changes. Those who can benefit from surgery will enjoy a shorter and easier recovery if they learn to self-manage their osteoarthritis today. Talk to your doctor to find out if surgery is right for you.

Take control of your osteoarthritis.

We’re here to help.

Contact Us

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www.vch.ca/oasis
About OASIS

OsteoArthritis Service Integration System (OASIS) is a Vancouver Coastal Health program developed to support people living with hip and knee osteoarthritis. OASIS provides assessments, education, and easy access to support services. Our team works in partnership with family doctors, orthopaedic surgeons and rheumatologists.

OASIS Education

OASIS education sessions can teach you about osteoarthritis and simple lifestyle changes that can help you manage your symptoms and slow the progress of your disease.

These sessions cover a range of topics including: introduction to osteoarthritis, nutrition, exercise, preparing for surgery, and pain management. They are available throughout the year at various locations within the Vancouver Coastal Health region. The region includes: Richmond, Vancouver, the North Shore, and the coastal mountain communities.

Learn more. Visit the OASIS website at www.vch.ca/oasis or call the OASIS Regional Office 604-875-4257

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