Joint pain is common, but you shouldn't have to “just live” with it. There are many ways to reduce joint pain so you can stay active your entire life.

**Osteoarthritis (OA)** is the most common type of arthritis, especially among older people. OA symptoms vary by the individual. For most people, OA can get worse over time if you don’t address the pain and symptoms now.

**What is OA?** Osteoarthritis mostly affects cartilage. The surface layer of cartilage breaks down and wears away. This allows bones under the cartilage to rub together, causing pain, swelling and loss of motion of the joint. Over time, these changes can affect the bones, tendons, and other joint tissues.

**What are some of the causes of OA?** Risk factors or causes of OA include aging, excess body weight, a prior joint injury, being female, genetics, and excessive/repetitive movement from certain jobs or sports.

**OA Signs & Symptoms**

- Joint pain typically in the hands, knees, feet, neck, hips and spine
- Several minutes of stiffness in a joint after getting out of bed or sitting for a long time
- Mild swelling or tenderness in one or more joints

**What is the difference between OA and RA?** Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) affects far fewer people than OA. RA is an autoimmune disease in which the body’s immune system attacks its tissues, including joints and organs. As compared to RA, OA affects only the joints, which causes changes to a joint’s cartilage, shape, and movement.

There is no cure for arthritis - however, joint pain and OA symptoms can be managed through treatment, lifestyle changes and education. Make an appointment with your healthcare provider and use the Talking With My Provider Worksheet to get you moving on a path to less joint pain.

Visit oaaction.unc.edu/jointpain for more information.
## Talking With My Provider

Use this worksheet to help you talk to your healthcare provider about your joint pain. Don’t be afraid to advocate for your health - be specific about what you are experiencing and your treatment goals.

### Where is your pain? Circle the locations of your pain, regardless of whether you experience constant pain or short flares.

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### Check all that apply to you:

- □ Over 45
- □ Excess body weight
- □ A prior joint injury
- □ Female
- □ Genetics or family history
- □ Excessive/repetitive movement from certain jobs or sports

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### How long have you had pain in these areas?

- □ Days
- □ Weeks
- □ Months
- □ Years

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### When in pain, how long does the pain last?

- □ Less than a minute
- □ Hours
- □ Days to Weeks
- □ Constant – no relief

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### What activities make the pain worse?

- □ Physical Activity ______________________
- □ Weight loss
- □ Heat/cold packs
- □ Braces
- □ Shoe inserts

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### Questions for your healthcare provider about joint pain and treatment.

**Add all the questions you have about joint pain and treatment.**

**Here are some recommendations to make sure you ask:**

- What treatments are best for my type of pain?
- What are some online resources that you trust for information?
- Will my pain get worse over time? Can it spread to other joints?