Arthritis? [1]

Alice,

What is arthritis? Is it a deterioration of cartilage?

? Wondering

Answer

Dear Wondering,

It can involve cartilage, but not only and not always. Affecting more than 46 million people in the United States alone, arthritis is a term used to describe any disorder that results in the inflammation of a joint, characterized by pain, swelling, stiffness, and redness. It is not a single disorder, but the name of a joint disease with a number of causes. Arthritis can involve one joint or many, including knees, wrists, fingers, and even the spinal column. Less common types of arthritis may affect other parts of the body, for example the kidneys or lungs. It can involve other symptoms too, such as rash, dry eyes, fever, fatigue, night sweats, or breathing problems.

Symptoms can vary in severity from a mild ache and stiffness to severe pain. In later progressions of some types of arthritis, it can include joint deformity. Osteoarthritis, also known as degenerative arthritis, is the most common form. It results from wear and tear on the joints, evolves in middle age, and most commonly troubles older people.

Rheumatoid arthritis is the second most common (and the most severe) type of inflammatory joint disease. Rheumatoid arthritis is an autoimmune disease, a disease in which the body’s white blood cells (the antibodies that protect the body from bacteria, viruses, and other invaders) attacks its own tissues. With rheumatoid arthritis, the body’s immune system damages joints and the surrounding soft tissue.

Other causes of arthritis include:

- Skin disorders
- Intestinal disorders
- Bacterial infections
- Severe inflammation

There are over 100 types of arthritis, including juvenile idiopathic arthritis, lupus, fibromyalgia,
infectious arthritis, and gout. It is believed that arthritis is caused by a combination of genetic and environmental factors. Often times, people have a genetic predisposition to arthritis and something in their environment triggers it. Depending on the type of arthritis, treatments include antibiotics, anti-inflammatory drugs, bed rest, exercises, or changes in diet. In some cases, splints or surgery may be helpful.

Arthritis can affect people of nearly all ages, though it is most prevalent in older adults. For more information, check out the National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases (NIAMS) Information Clearinghouse [2].

Here's to healthy joints,

Alice!

Category:
General Health [3]
Aches, Pains & Other Ailments [4]

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