

# Bathroom Briefs

Your line to good health!

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## Arthritis

### What is arthritis?

The word *arthritis* actually means joint inflammation, but the term has acquired a wider meaning. In public health, arthritis is used as a shorthand term for arthritis and other rheumatic conditions—a label for the more than 100 rheumatic diseases and conditions that affect joints, the tissues which surround joints and other connective tissue. The pattern, severity, and location of symptoms can vary depending on the specific form of the disease. Typically, rheumatic conditions are characterized by pain and stiffness in and around one or more joints. The symptoms can develop gradually or suddenly.



### Who is at risk for arthritis?

Certain factors are associated with a greater risk of arthritis. Some of these risk factors are modifiable while others are not.

#### Non-modifiable risk factors

**Age:** The risk of developing most types of arthritis increases with age.

**Gender:** Most types of arthritis are more common in women; 60% of the people with arthritis are women. Gout is more common in men.

**Genetic:** Specific genes are associated with a higher risk of certain types of arthritis, such as rheumatoid arthritis (RA) and systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE), and ankylosing spondylitis.

#### Modifiable risk factors

**Overweight and Obesity:** Excess weight can contribute to both the onset and progression of knee osteoarthritis.

**Joint Injuries:** Damage to a joint can contribute to the development of osteoarthritis in that joint.

**Infection:** Many microbial agents can infect joints and potentially cause the development of various forms of arthritis.

**Occupation:** Certain occupations involving repetitive knee bending and squatting are associated with osteoarthritis of the knee.

### What causes arthritis?

Elevated uric acid levels cause gout, and specific infections can cause certain forms of arthritis. The causes of many of the other forms of arthritis are unknown. Scientists are studying the role of factors such as genetics, lifestyle, and environment in the various types of arthritis.

### What are the symptoms of arthritis?

The pattern and location of symptoms can vary depending on the type of arthritis. Generally, people with arthritis feel pain and stiffness in and around one or more joints. The onset of arthritis symptoms can develop gradually or suddenly. Arthritis is most often a chronic disease, so symptoms may come and go, or persist over time.

### What should I do if I think I have arthritis?

If you have pain, stiffness, or swelling in or around one or more of your joints, talk to your doctor. It is important to keep in mind that there are many forms of arthritis, and a specific diagnosis of the type you have may help to direct the proper treatment. Although there is no cure for most types of arthritis, early diagnosis and appropriate management are important, especially for inflammatory types of arthritis. For example, early use of disease-modifying drugs can affect the course of rheumatoid arthritis. An early diagnosis and appropriate treatment can make a difference in pain and joint damage. The earlier you understand your arthritis, the earlier you can start managing your disease.

### How is arthritis diagnosed?

Diagnosing arthritis often requires a detailed medical history of current and past symptoms, physical examination, x-rays, and blood work. It is possible to have more than one form of arthritis at the same time.

### What are the treatments for arthritis?

The focus of treatment for arthritis is to control pain, minimize joint damage, and improve or maintain function and quality of life. According to the American College of Rheumatology, the treatment of arthritis might involve the following:

- Medication
- Nonpharmacologic therapies
- Physical or occupational therapy
- Splints or joint assistive aids
- Patient education and support
- Weight loss
- Surgery



In conjunction with medical treatment, self-management of arthritis symptoms is very important as well. The Arthritis

Foundation Self Help Program ([www.arthritis.org](http://www.arthritis.org)) and the Chronic Disease Self-Management Program ([http://www.cdc.gov/arthritis/interventions/self\\_manage.htm#2](http://www.cdc.gov/arthritis/interventions/self_manage.htm#2)), both developed by Dr. Kate Lorig of Stanford University, are effective self-management education programs.

For more information about arthritis, please call your healthcare provider or visit the Arthritis Foundation at [www.arthritis.org](http://www.arthritis.org).

**The Forsyth Co. Dept. of Public Health will offer the Chronic Disease Self-Management Program in October 2011. For more information about the class or to register, please call 336.703.3219.**