



ARTHRITIS 101:

Different Types, One Term

Developing arthritis with age is common. However, this disease does not discriminate, meaning anyone can become arthritic. In fact, people of all races, ages, and sexes live with the disease. Arthritis is the leading cause of disability in the United States. “Arthritis isn’t a single disease; the term refers to joint pain and joint disease, and there are more than 100 types of arthritis and related conditions,” according to the Arthritis Foundation.

Osteoarthritis: Osteoarthritis (OA) is the most common kind of arthritis, mainly occurring in the hands, spine, hips, and knees. OA is a disease of the entire joint, not just cartilage. “Bones in affected joints become weaker, the connective tissue that holds the joint together deteriorates and inflammation damages the joint lining,” according to the Arthritis Foundation.

Damage from osteoarthritis usually increases slowly over time, but some people experience progression more quickly. Although OA tends to increase

with age, please note that it’s not an inevitable aspect of getting older.

Staying active, maintaining a healthy weight, and limiting inflammatory foods such as sugar and highly processed foods, can help mitigate joint problems.

Rheumatoid arthritis: Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is different from many other kinds of arthritis. It’s actually an autoimmune condition that causes your immune system to attack the tissues in your joints.

A healthy immune system is protective because it generates inflammation to clear infections and heal injuries. But with inflammatory arthritis, the immune system is overactive, attacking healthy tissue, including joints in the spine, hands, and feet. In some cases, inflammation becomes systemic, damaging the eyes, skin, heart, and other organs.

According to the Arthritis Foundation: “Many, but not all types of inflammatory arthritis are considered autoimmune



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diseases because the immune system loses the ability to distinguish itself from not-self and attacks the body it's supposed to attack. Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is the most common form of autoimmune inflammatory arthritis.”

While it's not been determined what causes inflammatory arthritis in every person, according to the Arthritis Foundation:

The consensus is that something in the environment – a virus, stress or smoking, for example – can trigger it in people who are genetically predisposed. Recent research has also highlighted the complex and critical role of gut microbes in immune-related inflammatory diseases like RA.

There are many different treatment options for RA, including medications that help reduce or

control the damage caused by the body's immune response. A rheumatologist—a doctor who specializes in autoimmune, bone, and connective tissue diseases—can help determine the best course of treatment for you.

Psoriatic arthritis: Like rheumatoid arthritis, psoriatic arthritis is also an autoimmune condition. And as you may have wondered based on the name, psoriatic arthritis is closely related to psoriasis. In fact, according to the National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases (NIAMS), most people who develop psoriatic arthritis already have psoriasis.

Symptoms of psoriatic arthritis include pain and swelling in the joints in addition to scaly, inflamed patches of skin at the affected joints. People who have this condition may also

experience inflammation of the eye, fatigue, and other symptoms.

Medications that reduce or control the immune system's response may help manage symptoms. Anti-inflammatory drugs and injections of corticosteroids are also effective for managing symptoms.

There are also other types of arthritis, like ankylosing spondylitis, gout, and reactive arthritis. Talk with your Primary Care Physician (PCP) for arthritis questions or concerns. If you do not have a PCP, you may call the Customer Service number on your BCBSIL member ID card or [log on to](#)

[Blue Access for MembersSM](#)

[\(BAMSM\) bcbsil.com](#) and use

the Provider Finder. This fast,

easy-to-use tool improves

members' experience when searching for in-network healthcare providers.



FROM PAIN TO PROGRESS

You have arthritis—now what? Joint pain and inflammation from arthritis can easily derail your day, especially if it also causes stiffness, fatigue, and other symptoms. Creating a plan for arthritis management can help you prepare so you can live each day to the fullest. Here are some suggestions to get you started.

- **See your healthcare provider regularly.** Arthritis can worsen over time as the cartilage and other connective tissues in your joints sustain more damage. Your healthcare provider may order imaging tests to track the rate of damage and determine if your course of treatment is working effectively.
- **Take medication as directed.** Following your doctor's orders is important for reducing the damage arthritis causes in your joints—especially if your arthritis is autoimmune. Take any medication(s) your healthcare provider prescribes as directed to protect your joints and reduce symptoms.
- **Consider physical therapy.** A physical therapist can help you get stronger and reduce pain and other physical symptoms from arthritis. Ask your healthcare provider if physical therapy can help manage or improve your symptoms.
- **Seek out support.** Losing your mobility, coping with chronic pain from arthritis, and relying on help from loved ones can impact on your mental health. Talking to a therapist or joining a support group can help you work through your feelings around arthritis.

Don't suffer in silence with arthritis. If you've partnered with your physician to create a treatment plan, make sure you stick to it. If you haven't discussed the aches and pains you're experiencing with your doctor, schedule an appointment with your primary care physician. Also, explore trusted resources like the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Illinois blog post,



'[8 Surprising Facts About Arthritis](#)'. The BCBSIL Connect Community Blog offers various health articles and resources, and also provides a [chat feature](#) for questions and answers with the BCBSIL Connect Team.



SOURCES: [NIAMS.nih.gov \(types of arthritis\)](#), [NIAMS.nih.gov \(osteoarthritis\)](#), [NIAMS.nih.gov \(rheumatoid arthritis\)](#), [NIAMS.nih.gov \(psoriatic arthritis\)](#), [MayoClinic.org](#)

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EVENT DATES (Time: 10 am – 3 pm):

- Tuesday, October 1: Cook County Building
- Thursday, October 3: Stroger Hospital
- Tuesday, October 8: Juvenile Temporary Detention Center
- Thursday, October 10: Criminal Courts Building

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