

The word “arthritis” is a combination of “arthr-“ meaning joint and “-itis” meaning inflammation. Many medical terms are constructed the same way. Tendinitis is inflammation of a tendon. Bursitis is inflammation of a bursa.

Some people confuse inflammation and infection. Infections are produced by germs whereas inflammation can occur without the presence of any germs. Inflammation is actually the healing response generated by the body as it attempts to heal damaged tissue.

Although inflammation can cause pain, inflammation is actually a good thing, since healing will not occur without it. Inflammation becomes a problem when the body is unable to repair the damage, or the cause of the damage is not addressed. It is important to not limit treatment to reducing inflammation. When ever possible, the cause of the damage should be considered otherwise the damage can accumulate in the body and lead to chronic inflammation.

There are two general types of arthritis. The most common is called osteoarthritis or degenerative arthritis. The more rare form is an autoimmune disorder where the immune system attacks the tissues in the joints. Rheumatoid is the best known of the autoimmune category of arthritis.

Osteoarthritis results from injured joints that failed to heal completely or abnormally used joints that never had the opportunity to heal properly because they were repetitively abused.

Osteoarthritis is not directly caused by age. It is noticed more often in the elderly simply because the development of osteoarthritis is very gradual. It can take many years of abuse and neglect to lead to symptomatic arthritis.

Although it is commonly believed that osteoarthritis will not heal, this is not necessarily the case. If the abnormal joint stress is reduced and good nutritional practices are maintained, the body can often heal mild to moderate forms of osteoarthritis.

Appropriate nutrition for arthritis should include fish oil supplements to help moderate inflammation as well as the consumption of vitamin C, chondroitin sulfate and glucosamine sulfate. Methylsulfonylmethane (MSM) and hyaluronic acid have also been shown to be helpful for arthritis.

Chiropractic care can be very helpful in reducing osteoarthritis. Chiropractic adjustments help to restore normal joint function which helps to reduce the cause of many cases of arthritis. Chiropractic adjustments can be performed on most joints in the body in addition to the spine.

If you continue to be plagued by the pain of arthritis, look closer at the cause of the arthritis, improve your nutritional intake, exercise, and visit a doctor of chiropractic.

## **Cause and Effect.**

I am told by patients at least once a day that their pain is caused by arthritis. I frequently respond by asking the patient what arthritis means to them. Arthritis is such a commonly used term and has become a catch-all diagnosis for most aches and pains from middle age on. As a result, it has become virtually meaningless.

Arthritis is an easy way out for doctors. If a patient presents with pain in the neck or back or one of the extremities, and the patient is forty or older, then it is easy for the doctor to tell the patient it is arthritis, write a script for an anti-inflammatory drug and send the patient on her way.

The problem with this approach is that arthritis is a late effect not a cause. A late effect is a final change in the body that is then felt by the patient as a symptom. Late effects are the result

of a series of changes in the body that occur from an original cause. For example: Let's say you are driving down the road and you hit a large pot hole. The impact misaligns the front end of your car. You can't feel that so you don't know it has happened. In time the abnormal alignment causes excessive and abnormal wear on your tires. Eventually you may feel that as steering wheel vibration or the wheel pulling to one side. The cause is the pot hole. The early effect is the misalignment. The late effect is the worn tires. The symptom is the vibration and pulling.

You can treat the late effect by changing the tires, but that would only be a temporary fix. You can't do anything about the cause because that has come and gone. You can realign the front end. That would be treating the early effect and would have the best long term benefit. Now you still may need to change the tires as well, but in the body that is often not the case. Unlike your car, the body is self healing. Often if you correct the early effect, the body will repair the late effect and the symptom will go away naturally.

Most patients in this country have been conditioned to believe that arthritis is strictly the result of aging and since aging can't be reversed, the only thing that can be done is treat the symptoms. This is a false belief.

The cause of most arthritis is prolonged abnormal function of a joint. Age is a factor, because the older we are, the longer a joint may have been malfunctioning. The abnormal function is the early effect that follows the cause, typically some type of injury. The arthritis is the late effect and joint pain is the symptom. The take home message here is that you shouldn't be satisfied with a diagnosis of arthritis. Search for the cause if you can and treat the early effect by restoring or improving joint function. This is the specialty of chiropractic, so if you would like to try a different approach to the pain of arthritis, other than just treating the symptom, consult a chiropractor.