Arthritis

There are over 100 types of arthritis. Each type of arthritis is different, therefore, needs different treatment. Arthritis may cause pain, stiffness, swelling, tenderness or *inflammation* of the joints or affected areas. It can also prevent some movements which are necessary for the activities of daily living.

It is important that people should try to learn as much as possible about this *disease* so that they may be able to understand how to control it.

Did you know that:

- arthritis affects people from all age groups
- arthritis cannot be cured but may be controlled
- arthritis is a disease which usually lasts a lifetime but, in many cases, there are periods in which few or no symptoms are apparent (periods of *remission)*
- arthritis means that you have change in one or more of the following parts of your joints

Functional parts of a joint:

***Cartilage*:**
A tough material that cushions and protects the ends of bones. (Example of arthritis in this part: osteoarthritis.)

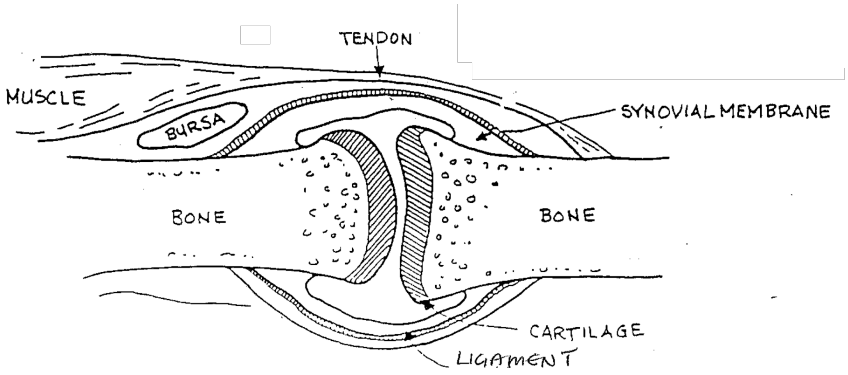
Synovial membrane:
A thin layer of tissue which surrounds the joint and contains and produces a *lubricating fluid* (synovial fluid). This fluid oils the joint and is also responsible for keeping the cartilage healthy. (Examples of arthritis in this part: rheumatoid arthritis, gout.)

Bursa:
A small sac located near the joint which contains a lubricating fluid. This sac allows smooth movement of muscle across muscle and tendon across bone. (Example of inflammation of this part: bursitis.)

Muscle:
The muscles are elastic tissues that work together to move the bones by contracting and relaxing. (Example of involvement of this part: fibrositis.)

Tendon:
Tissue fibre which attaches muscle to bone. (Example of involvement of this part: tendonitis.)

Ligament:
Tissue fibre which attaches bone to bone. (Example of arthritis in this part: ankylosing spondylitis.)



OSTEOARTHRITIS

Also called:

Degenerative joint disease
Degenerative arthritis
Osteoarthrosis

What is it?

Osteoarthritis is a degenerative disease which most often affects the 'weight-bearing joints' ie ankles, knees, hips, spine. The cartilage breaks down, tears, or rips and leaves the bone surfaces without a cushion.

How do I get it?

The cause of arthritis is not definitely known, but it can be caused by one or more of the following factors:

- normal wear and tear
- injuries to joints
- the natural ageing process
- heredity
- abuse of joints
- insufficient use of joints

How does it affect me?

Bony growths or 'spurs' may appear in the affected joint, causing intense pain and limited movement.

Due to the lack of cartilage, bone surfaces rub together resulting in pain and limited movement.

RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS

What is it?

Rheumatoid arthritis is a disorder which involves many of the body's systems and often affects the toes, ankles, knees, shoulders, elbows and fingers. The synovial membrane which lines the joint, becomes inflamed. About one person in 100 of the population have rheumatoid arthritis, and two to three times more women do than men.

How do I get it?

There is no known specific cause of rheumatoid arthritis, but the latest theories suggest that it develops from a viral or bacterial infection.

It is an auto-immune disease, which means your body is attacked by its own defence mechanism.

How does it affect me?

Rheumatoid arthritis causes many problems because it works on many of the body's systems.

Some of the problems are:

- pain
- swelling
- weakness
- fatigue
- stiffness
- weight loss
- fever
- joint deformity

Reference: Healthy happy ageing: a positive approach to active living
Yvonne Wagorn, Sonia Théberge, Dr William R Orban