

Joint matters

Aching joints and painful movements are synonymous with arthritis, a condition that affects women seven times more than men, finds SAVIA RAJAGOPAL

Defined literally as 'joint inflammation', arthritis affects millions of people around the world. Sixty percent of them are female! Dr. Ameet Pispati, consulting orthopaedic surgeon, Jaslok Hospital, says, "It is a medically proven fact that women are more prone to arthritis. Genetically, some diseases are found more commonly in women than men. Rheumatoid arthritis is seven times more likely to affect women and osteoporosis is most common." Stating further, he adds, "There is a condition called 'leupus' that almost exclusively affects women between the ages of 20 to 40." Throwing light on this, Dr. Rajveer Chinoy, consultant orthopaedic surgeon, P D Hinduja Hospital, says, "One of the suggested reasons why women are more prone to arthritis is hormone."

Symptoms:

All indicators have to be discussed in totality with the doctor. Dr. Pispati states that a woman should look out for the following signs...

- Persistent pain for a period of more than four weeks
- Swelling of a joint
- Pain associated with stiffness
- Decreased movement

Dr Chinoy, further explains, "Obesity or sedentary lifestyle is a major factor in knee osteoarthritis. Osteoarthritis is found mostly in bow-legged women."

Diagnosis:

There are around a hundred different kinds of arthritis. The pattern of symptoms indicate which particular kind of arthritis has affected the woman. Dr. Chinoy elucidates, "Women should first do a CBC/ESR blood test. Then if required, they can do RA (Rheumatoid Arthritis) and ANA (Antinuclear Antibody for Systemic Lupus Erythematosus) test. If needed, a thyroid profile and lipid profile should also be done." Dr. Pispati further elaborates, "Blood tests with a clinical representation can pinpoint what exactly ails the woman suffering from arthritis. For example, a woman suffering from osteoarthritis will suffer from pain in both knees whereas a woman who has rheumatoid arthritis will suffer from pain in multiple joints and morning stiffness, especially, in the fingers."

Treatment:

Doctors are unanimous in their verdict that exercise is the best way to treat arthritis. Says Dr. Pispati, "In general, exercise is absolutely essential. Today, there is more medication available, which can cure almost 70 types of arthritis, and nearly 30 types of arthritis can be managed efficiently. When it comes to osteoarthritis, weight loss and physiotherapy are ways to treat it. In a worst case scenario, replacement surgery is recommended. In the case of rheumatoid arthritis, modifying drugs help to a great extent." Again, specific treatment depends on the kind of arthritis that a woman suffers from.

Prevention:

It's not really possible to avoid arthritis altogether. But the onset of arthritis can be delayed. Dr. Chinoy reiterates the importance of regular exercises. One should avoid injuries to joints. It's vital to have regular calcium and vitamin intake. It's also essential to maintain your ideal weight.

To delay the onset of arthritis...

Keep weight under control

Stick to a daily exercise program

Weight bearing joints like hips and knees should be taken care of

Take a regular intake of calcium (1000 miligrams) in your diet

Women above 40 should not overdo walking and climbing of stairs

Women above 45 should especially take care while walking on treadmills or jogging

