

[IMAGE]

Cartilage: Going, Going... Gone

Osteoarthritis, the most common form of arthritis, involves the degeneration of cartilage within the joints. It is essentially due to "wear and tear" and may eventually eliminate the cartilage buffer between bones, causing them to rub together. Patients with osteoarthritis of the hip or knee are often instructed to perform regular exercise to reduce the pain and disability of the condition. The long-term effects of an exercise program on reducing arthritis symptoms are unclear, however.

A recent study in the *Annals of the Rheumatic Diseases* evaluated the effects of an exercise program on hip- and knee-osteoarthritis patients after three months of ongoing exercise therapy, and three and six months after conclusion of therapy. The 200 patients were divided into two groups. Both groups were administered education and drug treatment, but only one group completed 12 weeks of therapist-supervised strength, mobility, and coordination exercises, one-to-three times per week. Patients in both groups rated their pain weekly.

The exercise group showed decreased pain compared to the nonexercise group during the training period, as expected. However, the maximum beneficial reduction in pain in the exercise group occurred at the end of the exercise program, and declined steadily over the remaining six months of the study. Three months after discontinuing exercise, the exercise group still showed only a "small to moderate" reduction in pain; six months later, both groups showed similar pain levels.

These results are similar to those of other studies on the residual effects of exercise on osteoarthritis. If you have osteoarthritis of the hip or knees, maintaining a consistent exercise pattern can reduce your pain. A half-hour of aerobic exercise, three days per week, appears to generate the largest decreases in pain. Go to <http://www.chiroweb.com/tyh/sports.html> for more information about the benefits of sports and fitness.

Reference:

Van Baar ME, Dekker J, Oostendorp RAB, et al. Effectiveness of exercise in patients with osteoarthritis of hip or knee: Nine months' follow up. *Annals of the Rheumatic Diseases* 2001;60, pp. 1123-1130.

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