

Bones & Joints



Healthy lifestyle

It is essential to have an active lifestyle with healthy exercise in moderation to ensure that bones remain strong and healthy. "Along with that is a healthy balanced diet to ensure that enough calcium, minerals and vitamins are taken in. Some modern food and drinks can be harmful to bone formation, in particular, fizzy drinks that contain phosphoric acid as this removes calcium from the body," said Dr Wessels.

While healthy activity is required to keep joints functional, care must be taken not to overstrain joints as this can lead to damage to the cartilage surfaces and eventually to osteoarthritis. "One way in which strain to specifically the knee joints is caused, is through obesity. Therefore, weight loss for those who are overweight will assist greatly in preventing the development of osteoarthritis of the knees. Another contributor to joint damage is abnormal load on the joints due to poor posture or poorly designed footwear. Maintain good posture and wear good quality, comfortable footwear," said Dr Wessels.

Due to the various causes of joint and bone pain and many being easily treatable but having devastating consequences if left unchecked, it is preferable that people seek medical assistance with any new onset of pain or stiffness in a joint that does not resolve fully within a short period of time (a day or two). The doctor may refer you for x-rays and possibly blood tests depending on the clinical finding during examination. For the majority of conditions, treatment is effective in the early stages.

Bones are living tissue that continuously modify themselves according to the activity a person undertakes. With little activity to stimulate the bone cells, the bones will progressively become weaker. Joints are designed to move and therefore, healthy activity is required to keep them functional.

ER24 is urging people to live healthier lifestyles. Obesity, poor diet, smoking and lack of exercise are some risk factors that contribute to the development of joint and bone problems. Besides injuries, the most common bone and joint condition affecting people is arthritis. Dr Vernon Wessels, from ER24, said, "Osteoarthritis develops as a result of damage to cartilage of the joint due to abnormal loading causing wear and tear (usually taking years to develop), whereas rheumatoid arthritis is a condition where a person's own immune system causes damage to the cartilage. Septic arthritis is a condition where a person develops an infection in a joint, usually arising from another infective focus somewhere in the body. This is not too uncommon in young children and requires urgent attention." Another common inflammatory condition of the joints that affects adults is gout, where increased uric

acid causes crystals to be deposited in the joints causing damage and pain. "This is often precipitated through certain foods and drinks like alcohol (especially beer), red meat (especially liver and kidneys) and certain seafood (like anchovies, herring, mackerel and mussels).

"Cancers of the bone do occur. Fortunately, these conditions are not as common as the others mentioned. However, any abnormal growth or pain in bones, especially in children, should be seen to by a doctor," said Dr Wessels.

For most of the conditions mentioned above, if untreated, the patient will progressively lose more function of the particular joint, which in some cases can lead to other joints of the body receiving abnormal load and eventually also suffering damage. Many of the causes are treatable and for those that cannot be fully treated or prevented (as is often the case with rheumatoid arthritis), assistance devices are available to assist patients in still being able to function with day to day activities. In severe cases, joint replacement is an option for certain joints like the hip and knees or permanently stiffening a joint to limit pain (arthrodesis) which is often done for the ankles.

By not taking care of your bones and joints, you risk developing conditions that can significantly hinder your quality of life



Symptoms

Common symptoms in majority of conditions include pain and stiffness or limited movement of the joint. However, there are other symptoms that would point to a specific cause. For example, a warm, swollen painful joint is likely to be inflamed either through an infection as with septic arthritis or, through another joint inflammatory condition like gout.