

The Joint Health Hub copy

What is joint pain?

Joint pain is discomfort, soreness, or aching in one or more of the body's joints, which are the connections between bones that facilitate movement and provide structural support. Joint pain can range from mild and temporary to severe and chronic, affecting a person's mobility and quality of life.

Prevalence

Arthritis and other musculoskeletal (MSK) conditions affect over 17 million people across the UK,ⁱ with pain as one of the leading symptoms. Yet, joint pain does not only affect individuals diagnosed with joint health conditions. In fact, perimenopause, menopause, age-related changes and historic injuries are all factors that can contribute to prolonged joint pain and discomfort. As a result, 3 in 10 adults experience persistent pain, defined as lasting longer than 3 months.ⁱⁱ

Research shows that MSK conditions are highly prevalent and impact females more frequently and severely than males.ⁱⁱⁱ Notably, MSK conditions arise in postmenopausal females at rates higher than age-matched males,^{iv} highlighting how hormone differences between sexes can impact the development of conditions that lead to chronic joint pain.

Common causes of joint pain

- **Injuries:** Sprains, strains, or trauma to a joint or its surrounding structures
- **Arthritis:**
 - **Osteoarthritis (OA):** Degeneration of joint cartilage due to wear and tear
 - **Rheumatoid arthritis (RA):** An autoimmune condition causing joint inflammation
 - **Gout:** Caused by the accumulation of uric acid crystals in a joint
- **Inflammation:** Bursitis (inflammation of the fluid-filled sacs cushioning joints) or tendinitis (inflammation of tendons)
- **Infections:** Septic arthritis occurs when a joint becomes infected
- **Chronic Conditions:** Lupus, fibromyalgia, or psoriatic arthritis
- **Overuse or Repetitive Stress:** Can lead to joint strain or overuse injuries

Who is Affected by Joint Pain?

Joint pain can affect people of all ages but is more common in:

- Older adults, due to conditions like osteoarthritis
- Athletes, from repetitive stress or injuries
- Individuals with underlying conditions like autoimmune disorders or gout

ⁱ UK Health Security Agency. Why are musculoskeletal conditions the biggest contributor to morbidity? 2019. Available at: <https://ukhsa.blog.gov.uk/2019/03/11/why-are-musculoskeletal-conditions-the-biggest-contributor-to-morbidity/> (Accessed: December 2023).

ⁱⁱ NHS TIMS. Chronic or persistent musculoskeletal pain. No date. Available at: <https://www.tims.nhs.uk/self-care/chronic-or-persistent-musculoskeletal-pain/> (Accessed: December 2023).

ⁱⁱⁱ Overstreet DS, et.al; A Brief Overview: Sex Differences in Prevalent Chronic Musculoskeletal Conditions. Int.J.Environ.Res.Public.Health. 2023;20(5):4521. doi: 10.3390/ijerph20054521.

^{iv} Hart DA. Sex differences in musculoskeletal injury and disease risks across the lifespan: Are there unique subsets of females at higher risk than males for these conditions at distinct stages of the life cycle? *Physiol.* 2023;14:1127689. doi: 10.3389/fphys.2023.1127689.