
Osteoarthritis and rehabilitation

Toronto Rehab's Musculoskeletal Rehabilitation Program offers specialized interprofessional rehabilitation for people who have osteoarthritis and/or those who have undergone hip or knee replacements, joint revisions or trauma and who have other complex musculoskeletal problems.

What is osteoarthritis?

- Osteoarthritis, which is also known as degenerative joint disease, is the most common type of arthritis in adults. One of the most common chronic diseases, it is characterized by the breakdown of the joint's cartilage (the part that cushions the end of the bone). This causes bones to rub against each other, causing pain and loss of movement. Weight-bearing joints such as the knees, hips and back are the most affected.
- The exact cause of osteoarthritis (OA) is unknown, but it is associated with aging.
- OA can have a serious impact on quality of life. It can mean, for example, not being able to get dressed, walk or climb stairs which greatly reduces independence.

Facts about osteoarthritis

- One in 10 Canadians has osteoarthritis, and the incidence rate is rising. Arthritis can strike anyone at any time, regardless of age, physical condition or ethnicity.
- The prevalence of OA is higher in men before age 45 and in women after age 55. Women have a greater prevalence and severity of OA of the hands, knees, ankles and feet, while men have greater prevalence and severity of OA of the hips, wrist and spine.
- Beyond gender, other major risk factors for OA include genetic predisposition, mechanical stress, trauma, obesity and age. More than 80% of people aged 75 or over are affected.
- As the baby boomer population ages, one million more Canadians per decade will be diagnosed with arthritis, at least until 2031.
- More than 170 types of Arthritis cost over \$17 billion annually in health care expenses and lost workdays in Canada. There are no reliable estimates of the cost of osteoarthritis alone.
- Since it is related to age, OA will become an even bigger health problem and social expense for Canada in the future with our rising life expectancy and aging society. Rehabilitation is an integral part of Canada's solution to this challenge.

Toronto Rehab's expert osteoarthritis rehabilitation

- At Toronto Rehab, rehabilitation is the interprofessional process of helping people who experience disabling injury, illness and conditions associated with aging to regain the skills, abilities, confidence and independence they need to live their lives to the fullest.

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- Rehabilitation can significantly improve quality of life for people with OA by helping them reduce their pain and learn to improve their ability to perform activities of daily living.
- Rehabilitation treatment for osteoarthritis involves an individualized program combining physical therapy and occupational therapy with exercise and education. Physical activity has been shown to have great potential for reducing the negative consequences of OA, but the majority of people with OA unfortunately adopt sedentary lifestyles.
- In order to ensure our patients and others around the world can benefit from the newest therapies, methods and equipment, leading-edge research is at the centre of all care Toronto Rehab provides. Through close collaboration between Toronto Rehab researchers and clinicians, innovations in research are rapidly translated to the clinical setting.

Pushing the frontiers of osteoarthritis rehabilitation research

Toronto Rehab conducts high-impact research that leads to advances in knowledge, treatment and technology and has a valuable impact on people affected by disability and their caregivers. Our rehabilitation research program is one of the largest and most diverse in North America. Current osteoarthritis-related research projects include:

- **A different balance strategy** – Dr. William Gage, a Toronto Rehab adjunct scientist, has shown that people who undergo knee replacement surgery use a different strategy to maintain their balance. Although this may be okay, it's also possible their different balance strategy could increase the risk of falling or cause problems in other joints. Dr. Gage and colleagues have teamed up with clinicians at Toronto Rehab and Toronto Western Hospital to determine the impact of joint replacement surgery on the risk of falling. Osteoarthritis of the knee is a key reason for knee replacement surgery.
- **New model of joint replacement care** – Toronto Rehab was one of 26 health organizations involved in the creation of the Total Joint Network, an organization that produced an evidence-based, reorganized model of care for people who require total joint replacements. Under the new model, patients are assessed before surgery to identify who needs inpatient rehabilitation and who can go straight home with community-based rehabilitation services after surgery. The model increases access to total joint replacements, shortens wait times for these procedures, provides standardized care and reduces the total length of stay in hospital.

For more information

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