

Osteoarthritis, Osteopathy, and Glucosamine supplementation

What is Osteoarthritis?

Osteoarthritis is a term given to the normal 'wear and tear' changes that take place in our joints as we age. It is a slow progressive destruction of the articular cartilage in the weight bearing joints and fingers of older people, and can affect the joints of younger people secondary to trauma. The most common joints to be affected are the knees, hips, lower back, neck, fingers, and big toes.

Any activity that loads a joint, is repetitive, or any area where you have a history of repetitive injury, will be more prone to developing osteoarthritic change.

It is thought that normal joint use prompts the release of enzymes that break down articular cartilage. In healthy individuals this loss is replaced by new cartilage. When we age however, cartilage is worn out at a rate faster than it can be repaired and replaced, which therefore leads to the development of osteoarthritis.

Clinical picture of Osteoarthritis:

Osteoarthritis is characterised by deep achy joint pain, which is aggravated by activity and relieved by rest. The pain is also caused by periods of stiffness, which is common in the morning or after minimal periods of activity. It has a gradual onset, and often associated with joint enlargement, tenderness, pain, and reduced mobility.

On x-ray, joints are characterized by narrowing of the joint space, increased thickness of the subchondral bone (below the cartilage), subchondral cysts, and osteophytes (bone spurs).

Osteopathy and Osteoarthritis:

Osteopathic management of a condition ideally begins with the early detection of the condition, followed by conservative treatment and advice regarding individual management for the patient. Early detection requires a detailed history followed by a thorough physical examination to identify local pain causing tissues and also global compensatory affects due to the condition.

Because osteoarthritis results in restricted joint mobility and tightening through the supporting soft tissues, treatment and management is aimed towards:

- Improving normal joint range of movement and control
- Stretching of capsular and muscular restrictions
- Restoration of normal neuromuscular function
- Improving gait/walking patterns and activity
- The use of a walking aid if necessary

Treatment involves a lot of soft tissue massage/release, muscle and joint stretching, gentle joint mobilisation, home based exercises, and postural and ergonomic advice where necessary.

We can't reverse osteoarthritis but osteopathic treatment can give relief by mobilising and stretching affected joints and supporting soft tissues. This helps to improve flexibility and mobility. We can also introduce gentle exercise to stretch and stabilize/strengthen areas, and look at supplementation for joint health.

Glucosamine:

The most common supplementation for joint health is glucosamine. This is a natural sugar made in the body and found in certain foods and is used in the production of tendons, ligaments, and connective tissues within the body, such as the eyes, bone, and skin. It plays an important role in the production, maintenance, and repair of cartilage. Without enough glucosamine, the cartilage found in weight-bearing joints, such as the hips and knees, deteriorates. The cartilage then hardens and forms bone spurs, deformed joints, and limits joint movement.

Glucosamine is essentially a regulator of cartilage metabolism, which helps to keep cartilage from breaking down.

Studies show that the combination of Glucosamine and chondroitin together are more effective than by themselves. Glucosamine and chondroitin need to be taken for at least 8 weeks for effects to start being felt and are both fairly safe supplements with no major side effects, although there are precautions so always talk to your pharmacist prior to taking any new supplementation. Excessive doses of glucosamine and chondroitin sulphate may result in gastric symptoms such as nausea, diarrhoea, indigestion, and heartburn so always take as directed.

If you have any questions about osteopathy and treatment for osteoarthritis or any other complaint, please don't hesitate to contact Craig or Fionna at Balance Osteopathy Welcome Bay