Orthopaedic Connection

Do You Really Know The Difference?

By Thomas J. Haverbush, M.D.
Orthopaedic Surgeon

Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

Osteoarthritis and Osteoporosis are two words that share the same prefix and are confusing to many people. For those who know the two conditions well you can take a week off. Don’t forget to come back to class next week however!!
O.K., good, now that the others have left we can continue.
Osteo comes from the Greek word osteon and refers to bone.
Both conditions affect the skeletal system in major ways.

Osteoarthritis

Every movable joint in the body where two bones meet has a substance covering the bone ends called articular cartilage. This includes every joint from the little joints at the end of your fingers to the huge knee and hip joints.

There are many causes why joints become arthritic. If I start going into all the reasons arthritis occurs I’ll lose you.

So we will explain what happens and it is remarkably similar in all joints. The cartilage cushion between the bones begins to get scratchy and break down. Most people refer to it as “wear and tear”.

The joint lubrication becomes less slippery. Little spurs form on the joint edges. The ligaments that surround the joint tighten causing the joint to become stiff.

Dang, with all that it is no wonder the joints become painful and swollen. In a word inflamed. In the large hip and knee joints excessive weight aggravates the process greatly.

Osteoporosis

Most people think of bones as kind of inert or static and unchanging. Wow is that wrong. Bones are very active and are turning over their structure constantly.

Bone strength is generally at its peak at approximately age 30.

As we age the natural process is for bones to become weaker. The result is osteoporosis (or in its less severe stage, osteopenia).

Bone loss begins to outpace bone production so the bone structure of the skeleton becomes fragile and the risk of fracture is greatly increased.

Don’t think that osteoporosis affects only women. It affects both men and women.

In the first section I explained what happens to the joint in osteoarthritis; how it feels and malfunctions.

In osteoporosis it is exactly the opposite. It does not cause pain or stiffness or inflammation. You are unaware until you break a bone.

An Important Difference

There is an important screening test for osteoporosis to diagnose the condition. It is called a bone density test.

The schedule for testing is as follows:

- Women should be tested at age 65, men at age 70
- Anyone who fractures an arm or leg bone or a vertebra after age 50
• Family history of osteoporosis
• Anyone who has taken steroids for longer than a short course orally or who has had many steroid injections.

Treatment of these two conditions has been covered well in several other Orthopaedic Connection articles and of course in other sources.

I hope I have increased your awareness of the difference between the two conditions that sound somewhat alike.

*My patients put their trust in me and what I do improves the quality of their lives.*

**Gratiot County Herald Archive and Office Website.**

I sincerely appreciate all of you loyal readers and patients present and future and welcome all newcomers!

Besides what you read today there is a huge treasure trove of Orthopaedic and musculoskeletal information at [www.orthopodsurgeon.com](http://www.orthopodsurgeon.com). It contains the Website Library, Your Orthopaedic Connection and complete archive of every GCH article I have written.

I specialize in you. Be well.

Dr. Haverbush