

Osteoarthritis

Dr Louise Warburton presents the diagnostic and management pathway for osteoarthritis

Patient over 45 years old presents with joint pain

Typical history of OA: pain and stiffness in joints, gelling after inactivity

Examination findings: Heberden's and Bouchard's nodes, and bony enlargement of joints

GP excludes red flags:
• Inflammatory arthritis
• Bone tumour
• Infection
Excludes other causes and diagnoses OA

X-ray or not?
An X-ray is not necessary to make a diagnosis of OA. X-ray if there is trauma, infection, doubt in diagnosis or change in symptoms, for assessment prior to joint replacement or patient preference (after risk assessment and discussion)

• Assess severity of symptoms using a functional score such as Arthritis Research UK's MSK-HQ¹ or the Oxford knee and hip scores^{2,3}
• Holistic assessment using NICE algorithm (see resources)

FOR SEVERE SYMPTOMS
Such as uncontrolled joint pain, failure of conservative management, severe loss of function such as inability to walk and low Oxford hip or knee joint score:
• Consider joint replacement
• Shared decision-making to discuss options
• Refer to specialist orthopaedic care
• Physiotherapy
• Healthy lifestyles assessment

FOR MILD TO MODERATE SYMPTOMS
• Consider supported self-management programme such as JIGSAW, developed by Keele⁴
• Analgesia, such as a topical NSAID or paracetamol

Refer to healthy living adviser or exercise and weight loss programme

FOR MODERATE SYMPTOMS
Consider
• Physiotherapy to address poor muscle strength and coordination
• Supported self-management programme or healthy living adviser
• Analgesia
• Joint injection with steroid

Review with practice team and consider stepping up or stepping down care

JIGSAW
The initial JIGSAW programme from Keele University, designed to help GPs diagnose and manage OA, developed a targeted consultation, using patient input to help design a template with questions and a way to record the data gathered from such a consultation. There are resources available, including the consultation template, training resources in PowerPoint and an excellent patient guidebook, which was written with the Keele University patient participation group

References
1 Arthritis Research UK. Musculoskeletal Health Questionnaire. tinyurl.com/AR-MSKHQ
2 Dawson J et al. Questionnaire on the perceptions of patients about total hip replacement. *J Bone Joint Surg Br.* 1996;78(2):185-90. tinyurl.com/Ox-hip-score
3 Dawson J et al. Questionnaire on the perceptions of patients about total hip replacement. *J Bone Joint Surg Br.* 1998;80(1):63-9. tinyurl.com/Ox-knee-score
4 Keele University. Joint Implementation of Guidelines for Osteoarthritis in the West Midlands (JIGSAW) tinyurl.com/keele-jigsaw
Further reading
1 NICE (2014) Osteoarthritis: care and management [CG177]. nice.org.uk/cg177

Dr Louise Warburton is a GPSI in rheumatology and musculoskeletal medicine for NHS Telford and Wrekin, and a senior lecturer at Keele University

SCIENCE PHOTO LIBRARY