



# Osteoarthritis

VA researchers are working to understand the biological causes of cartilage degeneration and are testing new drugs and other medical and rehabilitative treatments for osteoarthritis. Among the VA sites conducting important work in this area is the Bone and Joint Rehabilitation Center of Excellence, based at the Palo Alto, Calif., VA Medical Center.

## *Examples of VA Research Advances*

**Hyaluronic acid found effective for ankle arthritis** – A study at the Miami VA Medical Center found that injections of a natural liquid called sodium hyaluronate, also known as hyaluronic acid, may be a safe and effective option to treat ankle pain caused by osteoarthritis. The therapy, which helps lubricate and cushion the joints, has been in use for knee osteoarthritis for several years—mainly for those who still need relief after trying drugs, exercise, or physical therapy. Researchers are increasingly exploring its potential benefits for other joints affected by osteoarthritis.

**Racial disparities in joint replacement** – Researchers at VA’s Center for Health Equity Research and Promotion are studying how to best target educational materials about knee replacements to African American patients. African Americans are up to five times less likely than whites to undergo the procedure. In a study involving up to 600 older African American Veterans in Pittsburgh and Cleveland, the researchers are testing whether an educational video plus counseling helps close the racial gap in the use of the procedure.

**Improving self-care** – Researchers at the Durham VA and Duke University are conducting the Self-Management of Osteoarthritis in Veterans Study to test whether providing special educational materials and following up with monthly telephone support can help patients with arthritis reduce their pain levels. The study will include 519 Veterans with osteoarthritis of the hip or knee.

## Facts About Osteoarthritis

Osteoarthritis, or degenerative joint disease, is the most common form of arthritis. It affects up to 20 million Americans, most of them elderly. Symptoms include pain, stiffness, and swelling in the joints. Scientists once thought the disease resulted simply from “wear and tear” on the joints; now they are exploring a complex web of biological factors that may contribute to cartilage breakdown. Increased attention in recent years to the adverse side effects of some pain relievers has underscored the urgency of research on the prevention of arthritis and alternative treatments for pain symptoms.

