Comparing Osteoporosis and Arthritis

by BRENDA VANTA

The Difference Between Osteoporosis and Arthritis

Osteoporosis and arthritis are two common conditions affecting the skeletal system. The similarities can cause confusion, yet these two conditions are very different in terms of symptoms, management, and more. Let's have a quick review of the differences between osteoporosis and arthritis.

How They Affect the Skeletal System

Both osteoporosis (OP) and arthritis can cause mobility problems and disability, but the reasons are different. In OP, the bones become less dense, and therefore weaker and more prone to fractures. Arthritis primarily affects the joints and surrounding tissues. In osteoarthritis (OA), there will be degeneration of the cartilages between the joints and bone deformities. In rheumatoid arthritis (RA), the joint inflammation is marked, leading to joint pain, stiffness, malformation and reduced mobility. Off note, RA also affects other organs such as heart, lungs or eyes.

Risk Factors for Developing Osteoporosis Versus Arthritis

The older you get, the more likely you will have OP or OA, while RA can develop in children and younger adults. Having family members diagnosed with OP or arthritis increase your risk of having the same condition as well. Menopause is linked with OP, as the female hormones protect against bone loss. Smoking, excessive alcohol consumption and anorexia nervosa are risk factors for OP, while being overweight increase the chance to develop OA. Being inactive increases your risk for OP, while being too active can damage your joints earlier in life and develop OA.

Treatment Options

Non-steroid anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as naproxen, prescription pain killers (i.e. narcotics) and muscle relaxants can be recommended in both OP and arthritis with the goal of reducing pain and inflammation. Improving the levels of vitamin D can help both OP and the progression of OA.

However, the standard therapy for OP involves drugs like raloxifene, Bisphosphonates, Calcitonin , Parathyroid hormone or hormone replacement therapy, which are never used in arthritis. Similarly, there are specific anti-RA drugs (Methotrexate, Glucocorticoids, and Disease-modifying antirheumatic drugs) which are used for rheumatic forms of arthritis, and are never prescribed for OP.

Is There a Link between Osteoporosis and Arthritis?

Research studies reveal good news for OA sufferers: they are less likely to develop OP. On the other hand, if you have RA it is more likely to also receive the diagnosis of OP, especially because some anti-RA drugs affect the bone health.

Exercise is Beneficial for Both

Regular exercise helps prevent bone loss, while keeping the bones, muscles and joints strong and flexible. Exercise also decreases inflammation over time and helps your body release feel good chemicals (which also have pain killer qualities).

Physical therapy and rehabilitation are therefore beneficial in both cases. Low impact aerobics, swimming, tai chi and yoga are all great options, but you should also get an individualized plan from a physiotherapist for your specific condition.

Best Diet to Prevent Osteoporosis and Arthritis

A Mediterranean diet is the best choice not just for a healthy heart and weight management. Studies found this diet is beneficial for OP, as well as degenerative and inflammatory arthritis. Here is the new updated version of this diet.