

# Management of osteoarthritis

Summary of NICE guidance

The 2022 update to the NICE guidance on osteoarthritis (<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng226>) adds a new emphasis on non-pharmacological management, reserving pharmacological management for short term management and increasing the ability of patients to engage in therapeutic exercise. This graphic shows a summary of the management strategies now recommended, highlighting the changes.



Person with activity-related joint pain  
 45 years or older  
 Morning joint-related stiffness:  
**None** or **Lasts no longer than 30 minutes**  
 Diagnose osteoarthritis clinically without imaging, unless there are atypical features or features that suggest an alternative or additional diagnosis

 Orange boxes show changes between the new (2022) and previous (2014) NICE guidance

## Non-pharmacological management

**Exercise**

- Offer therapeutic exercise tailored to patients' needs
- Consider combining with an education programme or behaviour change approaches
- Consider supervised exercise sessions

**Weight management**  
 If living with overweight or obesity:

- Support them to choose a weight loss goal
- Advise them of the benefits of weight loss
- Explain that any weight loss is likely to be beneficial, but that losing 10% is likely to be better than 5%

**Manual therapy**

- Consider manual therapy alongside therapeutic exercise
- But only for people with hip or knee osteoarthritis

**Devices**

- Consider walking aids for people with lower limb osteoarthritis

**Information and support**

- Tailor information to patient needs, and provide in an accessible format
- Signpost to information on:
  - The condition
  - Specific types of exercise
  - Managing symptoms
  - Accessing other information and support
  - Benefits and limitations of treatment
- Do not offer**
  - Acupuncture or dry needling
  - Electrotherapy
- Insoles, braces, tape, splints or supports, unless certain scenarios are fulfilled†

## Pharmacological management

Pharmacological treatment should be seen as short term therapy to facilitate maximum function and engagement with non-pharmacological treatments

- Use the lowest effective dose for the shortest possible time
- Review with the person whether to continue treatment

**Topical NSAIDs\***

- Offer for knee osteoarthritis
- Consider for osteoarthritis that affects other joints

**Oral NSAIDs\***

- Consider if topical medicines are ineffective or unsuitable, alongside a gastroprotective treatment

**Do not offer**

- Paracetamol** (No longer considered as a first line treatment)
- Weak opioids** (Unless: Used infrequently for short term pain relief)
- Strong opioids** (All other treatments are ineffective or unsuitable)
- Glucosamine**
- Intra-articular hyaluronan**

**Consider**

- Intra-articular corticosteroid** (for short term relief when other pharmacological treatments are ineffective or unsuitable)

## Referral for joint replacement

Consider referring people with hip, knee, or shoulder osteoarthritis for joint replacement if:

- joint symptoms are substantially impacting their quality of life
- and
- Other management is ineffective or unsuitable

Do not exclude people with osteoarthritis from referral for joint replacement because of:

- Age
- Sex or gender
- Smoking
- Comorbidities
- Overweight or obesity

\* NSAID = non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug † See full guidance for further details

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# Arthritis Foundations Guide To Pain Management

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