



Osteoarthritis

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

Examples of VA research advances

- **Popular remedies put to the test**—A nationwide clinical trial led by a VA investigator and involving nearly 1,600 patients with osteoarthritis of the knee found little benefit overall for the widely used nutritional supplements glucosamine and chondroitin sulfate. The findings did suggest, however, that the supplements may help those with more severe pain. The study, led by Dr. Daniel Clegg of the Salt Lake City VA and the University of Utah and funded by the National Institutes of Health, was the most rigorous trial to date of the supplements, which are taken either alone or in combination by millions of arthritis sufferers around the world.
- **Racial disparities in joint replacement**—Researchers at VA's Center for Health Equity Research and Promotion are studying how to better educate African-American patients about knee replacements. African Americans are up to five times less likely than whites to undergo the procedure. In a new 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 have launched 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. Researchers 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 possible side effects of certain pain-relieving medications has underscored the urgency of research on the prevention of arthritis and alternative treatments for pain symptoms.

