



Tired of Being Kept Up at Night? Here's How to Get a Better Sleep with Osteoarthritis

by ALISON RICHARDS

Osteoarthritis Pain at Night

Osteoarthritis is a condition that leads to people suffering from pain, stiffness and sometimes swelling in their joints. It is more common in people over 50 and twice as many women suffer than men. It is generally caused by the deterioration of the cartilage on the end of the bones. This cartilage usually protects the bone endings and prevents friction when the body moves. As the cartilage erodes, the bones may grate or crack and become stiff to move. The erosion can cause pain, both day and night. In this article, we explore osteoarthritis pain at night and offer tips for how you can get a good night's sleep.

Osteoarthritis can also develop after a break or trauma to the area, from being overweight or having a family history of the disease. Osteoarthritis is not to be confused with rheumatoid arthritis. Rheumatoid arthritis is an autoimmune disease that does cause swelling in the joints, but this is due to the immune system attacking itself rather than the wear and tear of the joints. Rheumatoid arthritis is usually diagnosed in younger patients, whereas osteoarthritis tends to develop later in life.

The Most Common Areas for Osteoarthritis

Osteoarthritis is most commonly found in the hands, hips and knees, but can occur on any joint in the body including the spine, neck and shoulders.

Osteoarthritis of the hands can happen to either hand and it does not matter whether you are left or right handed. It is most common on the fingertip and middle joints of the index and middle fingers, the thumbs and wrists. Nodules or bony growths may develop on the joints increasing the stiffness and limiting movement. The thumb may feel particularly sore on the base joint where it joins the palm. Thumbs and wrists can quite often crack or make a grating sound when you move them. As a sufferer myself, it can be debilitating and simple things such as knocking on someone's door or using a computer keyboard are very painful. Gripping things is tricky, including the gear shift when driving, because you cannot bend your fingers enough.

Osteoarthritis in the knees is very common as well due to the knees taking on the stress and weight of the body. It causes stiffness and swelling around the joint; sufferers can find that their knees lock up, making it hard to stand from a sitting position. They may also feel like their knees "give away" when walking or running.

The hips are another common area for osteoarthritis. Like the knees, the hips take a lot of our body weight during rest and movement. As osteoarthritis develops, the bones and the ball joint rub against one another as the bone cartilage starts to wear away. This causes stiffness and joint-locking, making it difficult to bend down, stand up and even walk.

How Osteoarthritis Can Affect Sleep Quality

Any type of pain can affect your quality of sleep. Osteoarthritis causes pain and stiffness that may prevent you from getting comfortable. The pain may be so intense that it takes over your emotions, leaving you feeling far from relaxed and ready for sleep.

If you have been suffering from chronic osteoarthritic pain you may find that your mental health has been affected. People suffering from depression or anxiety often find that dark or worrying thoughts are more intense at night, which prevents them from falling asleep easily.

How to Improve Your Sleep Quality and Reduce Osteoarthritis Pain at Night

As with any insomnia, or trouble getting to sleep, you should be following a good sleep routine. Maintaining a healthy diet during the day is also important; make sure not to eat too close to bedtime. Here are some tips for getting a good night's sleep with osteoarthritis:

- Keep a regular exercise routine
- Have a warm bath before bedtime, including the use of aromatherapy oils or Epsom salts
- Open your bedroom window a little
- Make sure you are not too hot or too cold
- Have a warm milky drink before bedtime
- Switch off your phone and social media at least one hour before bedtime
- Avoid other stimuli such as the TV; perhaps read a book by lamplight instead
- Practice meditation or gentle yoga, including hand yoga

If you suffer from osteoarthritis you may find additional aids or medication useful, in addition to a good bedtime routine.

Sleep Support Aids for Osteoarthritis

Those with osteoarthritis of the knees or hips might find that using pillows to aid sleep is more comfortable. If you sleep on your side, a regular pillow or an orthopedic knee pillow placed in between the knees will help to keep your knees supported and your hips aligned correctly. If you prefer to sleep on your back, a pillow under the knee bend or buttocks may feel more comfortable. Be sure to support the lower back and neck also.

If your osteoarthritis pain at night is in the neck or upper spine, you may like to use a rolled-up towel or cushion underneath your neck to give it additional support. Or, use a wedge cushion, pregnancy/nursing pillow or arrange your regular pillows to slope a little to ensure a comfortable position.

While it is important to mobilize joints in the daytime, sufferers from osteoarthritis of the hands may benefit from using a splint or wrist support at night.

Pain Relief for Osteoarthritis

If you follow a good sleep regime and cannot find comfort from pillows and supports, you may have to resort to medication or other forms of pain relief for osteoarthritis pain at night. These could include medications and self-help therapies including:

- Hot and cold packs
- Heat and freeze rubs, gels and sprays that may or may not contain medication
- Over-the-counter pain-relieving drugs such as acetaminophen
- Anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as ibuprofen
- The use of a TENS machine

If you cannot manage your pain or sleep yourself, you should seek further advice from a doctor as there are medical treatments available to treat osteoarthritis.
