

Common Orthopedic Misconceptions

Misconception 1: Osteophyte causes joint pain

Osteophyte is the bony projection that forms along a joint. It can be easily detected in X-rays of degenerated joints such as the knee joint. Osteophyte around the knee do not cause pain. Joint pain is caused by cartilage wear and thus, abnormal contact between the underlying bone and inflammation. It is not necessary to remove osteophytes around the knee joint.

Misconception 2: Knee pain is a result of osteoporosis

People often confuse osteoporosis with osteoarthritis (joint degeneration). Osteoporosis is a disease of generalised decrease in bone density. Symptoms usually only comes after fracture. Treatments include calcium supplement and drugs to increase bone density. Osteoarthritis occurs when cartilage in joints wear down. Calcium and drugs to improve bone density are not helpful. Drugs to provide nutrition to cartilage such as glucosamine (a natural compound found in healthy cartilage) may help. If non-surgical treatments do not work, a joint replacement surgery may be needed.

Misconception 3: Elderly should not undergo surgery after hip fracture

Hip fracture is common in osteoporotic elderly after fall. Patients suffer from significant hip pain, even if they perform gentle limb movements. They have grossly impaired daily function and become bed-bounded. Prolonged bed rest in elderly is associated with life-threatening complications, e.g. pneumonia, venous thrombosis (blood clot in one or more of the veins) and urinary tract infection. Surgery is the most effective treatment for hip fracture. It can lead to quick recovery and avoids the problem of prolonged bed rest.

Misconception 4: Leg pain is always caused by problems of the leg

A leg pain is not necessarily caused by problems in the leg. It can be a symptom of sciatica. The sciatic nerve is the longest nerve in the body. It connects the nerves from the lumbar spine (in the lower back), travels along the buttock and divides into branches to supply the leg and foot. Compression of the nerves up in the spine can cause pain lower in the leg. Treatments should focus on the compression site instead of the area of pain.