

marie claire

fitness

Figuratively speaking, it may be your shoulders that are carrying the weight of your existence, but medically speaking, it's your knees and hips that are doing all the hard work. They're the largest weight-bearing joints of your body. And as women, we have weaker muscles and heavier bodies, and this predisposes us to joint pains. To add to this, hormonal changes associated with physiological changes means more wear and tear in these crucial joints.

Young and vulnerable
If aching knees remind you of your grandmom, wake up! More and more younger women are now complaining of these problems, which doctors say are compounded by our unhealthy lifestyle and inadequate nutrition.

The way our bodies are made, we start losing calcium content by the time we reach menopause. This leads to brittle bones or osteoporosis, which usually affects older women. So why should young women worry about bone densities? Simply because today more and more young women are developing osteomalacia, a condition where the bones are softened due to defective bone mineralisation. This is almost always related to poor lifestyles: Bad nutrition, low vitamin-D levels and low bone strength. "Five years ago, only 10 per cent women below the age of 40 years came with knee disorders; today the numbers have increased to about 40 per cent," says Dr S.K.S. Marya, director and chief surgeon, Max Healthcare.

"Low-protein diets also increase the chances of getting orthoarthritis and conditions related to it," says Dr Harshvardhan Hedge, head orthopaedic and spine surgeon,

Even the slightest pain in your joints can disrupt a healthy lifestyle. With a reported increase in incidents of knee and hip disorders amongst younger women, we bring you a troubleshooting guide.

By Palak Malik

(K)need not WORRY

Artemis Health Institute in Gurgaon.

Also, beware of other types of arthritis such as rheumatoid arthritis, which is inflammatory; post-trauma injuries; and infective joint problems like tuberculosis. Any disorder obstructs the normal course of activities, and weighs heavily on the joints.

HERE'S WHAT YOU SHOULD DO:
Control your weight

■ Keep your weight under check. "Every extra kilo you pile up stresses your joints, which leads to wear and tear," says Dr Pratip Mandal, who specialises in the field of sports injury

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RUN, BUT TO THE DOC

You know you have to seek a doctor's help when:

- You have an ache or pain in the calf, shin or in the thigh and it increases with every movement
- There is no relief even after massaging
- You feel uneasy when at rest and experience pain while sleeping
- There is actual limitation of movement and you are unable to perform your daily functions
- There is swelling or redness after an injury, or an inflammation

Knee and hip replacement is advised only in cases of severe pain along with inability to walk properly. The recovery is usually quick. "It's only the decision to undergo a surgery that is often delayed, since most Asians culturally are resistant to the idea of going under the knife," says Dr Mandal.

at Moolchand Medcity, New Delhi.

- Take a healthy diet that includes proteins, calcium, minerals and salts.

Exercise

- It's very important to do a little warm-up before you start with a rigorous exercise regime.
- Move all your joints while exercising. "Alternate between muscle training and aerobic exercises to avoid degenerative conditions," says Dr Mandal.
- Also, strengthen your muscles with regular physical activity. "Enrol for a swimming class or just go for a brisk walk in the morning or evening," suggests Dr Marya.

Give your knees a break

If your job involves standing for long hours at a stretch, make sure you sit down every one or two hours for a few minutes to relieve your muscles. If you sit down in a particular posture for more than 40 minutes, you are quite likely to fatigue your muscles. "We have a mobile structure, which is why we need constant movement. Even while sleeping we need to change our positions, which our body does involuntarily," says Dr Marya.

When in pain

- Avoid squatting, sitting cross-legged or climbing stairs.
- Do not indulge in any sports activity, "Games like basketball and squash can be extremely harmful," says Dr. Mandal.
- Completely avoid twisting your knees at any time.

Pay heed to it

High heels may not exactly result in a knee or hip disorder but they are often the source of discomfort that aggravates the pain. "With the extra height and awkward posture while walking, high heels disturb the centre of gravity of the body," says Dr Marya. It is safe to wear heels three to four hours at a stretch but beyond that it is stressful for your body. So keep a spare pair of flats in your car, and wear heels only as you step into the party. ■