

# Managing Pain in a Post-Vioxx World: Follow-Up Materials

## FACT SHEET OSTEOARTHRITIS

### What is Osteoarthritis?

Osteoarthritis is the most common type of arthritis and tends to be more common in older people. It affects about half of all people over the age of 65 and is more common in women than in men.

Osteoarthritis affects the weight-bearing joints like knees, hips and ankles, and causes the smooth surface of the cartilage to become rough. Normally, cartilage helps bones to glide over one another, in an osteoarthritis patient, however, the cartilage is broken down and eventually wears away. As a result, instead of gliding, bones rub against each other, which causes the joint to become deformed. Pain, stiffness and weakness of the associated muscles are the implications.

At present, joint damage due to osteoarthritis is not reversible, so early detection and immediate intervention are critical to its successful management, especially as the course of osteoarthritis is often progressive.

### Incidence

At present, OA affects more than 20 million people in the USA. The WHO Global Burden of Disease Monitoring Programme has identified osteoarthritis as one of the top ten causes of disability for countries within the EU, while back pain is cited as a major cause of work incapacity. In terms of disability adjusted life years (DALYs), osteoarthritis is the 4<sup>th</sup> most frequently cited cause of problems world-wide in women, and the 8<sup>th</sup> in men.<sup>1</sup>

### Cause of disease

The reasons people develop osteoarthritis is not well understood, but it is not a natural part of aging. Some people may inherit the tendency to develop this disease, in other cases an injury to a joint may be the cause. Studies have shown that obesity, inactivity, and muscle weakness can increase a person's chances of developing osteoarthritis.

### Treatment options for osteoarthritis

The goals in managing osteoarthritis are pain control, improved functional independence and enhanced quality of life.

A wide variety of medication is available for the treatment of osteoarthritis, the mainstay still being pain-killers and anti-inflammatory drugs such as non-steroidal

---

<sup>1</sup> Murray CJL et al., The global burden of disease: a comprehensive assessment of mortality and disability from diseases, injuries and risk factors in 1990 and projected to 2020. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1996, Vol.1.

anti-inflammatory drugs NSAIDs (e.g., acetaminophen, aspirin, ibuprofen, celecoxib), corticoids and COX-II inhibitors.

These medicines, however, can have serious side effects, e.g. gastro-intestinal complications, blood-clotting disorders, or, as seems to be the case with COX-II inhibitors can lead to malfunctions of the liver or heart and may even cause infarctions.

Especially in light of the worldwide recall of the COX-II inhibitor rofecoxib a trend towards a more natural lifestyle has developed. Particularly individuals with joint health problems, a condition that is usually chronic and requires long-term treatment, are looking for compounds with no known side effects and interactions, which could assist with treatment, and possibly reduce the dependency on pain-killers and anti-inflammatory drugs.

Apart from complementary therapies such as light exercise, weight reduction and heat or cold therapy, dietary supplements have gained attention as alternatives to rescue medication. In addition, herbal ingredients are perceived by some to be natural, alternative ways to possibly improve joint health.