

# A warm, swollen painful joint (monoarthritis)

Emergency Department

Information for Patients

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## What is monoarthritis?

Monoarthritis is when you have sudden swelling or pain (inflammation) in one joint. It can be the first sign of many different joint problems. The most common causes are **osteoarthritis**, **gout**, and **injury**.

To treat it properly, doctors need to know which cause is most common and choose the right tests to find out what caused it.

It can start suddenly or develop slowly. Any joint can be affected. The knee, ankle, wrist, and big toe are most common.

## Common Causes

Monoarthritis can happen for many reasons. It can be because of:

### 1. Injury

- Sprains, fractures, or cartilage damage
- Pain often starts right away after trauma
- Overuse of the joint

### 2. Infection (Septic Arthritis)

- Bacteria or viruses entering the joint can cause severe pain, swelling, and fever
- **This is an emergency and needs medical attention right away.**
- A bone infection (Osteomyelitis)

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or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

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### 3. Crystal arthritis

- **Gout** (uric acid crystals)
- **Pseudogout** (calcium crystals)
- Sudden, very painful attacks are typical

### 4. Arthritis conditions

- Early rheumatoid arthritis
- Psoriatic arthritis
- Reactive arthritis
- Ankylosing spondylitis
- Osteoarthritis (less commonly one joint)

### 5. Other causes

- Lyme disease (in tick-exposed areas)
- Osteoarthritis (less commonly one joint)
- Bone malignancies
- Avascular necrosis
- Loose bodies
- Sarcoidosis
- Systemic lupus erythematosus

## Diagnosing monoarthritis

As this condition can be caused by different medical problems, you must see a medical professional when the problem starts. Early treatment can prevent the condition worsening and lower long term health complications.

It is likely we will take do a physical examination and get a detailed history from you about your health. We may also do additional tests if needed. This may include:

- taking a sample of the fluid that sits around your joint,
- blood tests
- imaging scans like x-rays.

Sometimes it may take more than one test to diagnose the underlying condition.

Even if you do not think your pain is an emergency, still think about making an appointment with your GP if your symptoms affect your quality of life. Pain, swelling or redness in a joint should always be looked at by a medical professional.



## When should I get medical help?

**Go to a doctor or emergency department right away if you have:**

- severe joint pain with swelling and redness
- a high fever along with your arthritis symptoms, which could be signs of an infection
- not being able to move or bear weight on the joint
- joint pain and swelling after an injury
- symptoms that worsen quickly
- recently had surgery and have sudden pain, swelling, warmth, or redness to your joint.

All the above can be signs of a **joint infection**, which need rapid treatment.

In the emergency department a diagnosis may be suggested, but as mentioned the underlying condition is not always identified straight away.

## Contact details:

- In case of an emergency call **999**
- Ambulatory: **0116 252 0058**
- Minor Injuries Unit, Emergency Department, Leicester Royal Infirmary: **0116 258 5727**
- Minor Injuries Minor Illness (MIAMI), Leicester Royal Infirmary: **0116 259 6247**

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